

Paul J. Brooks

North Ridge Life Church

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Christian Growth is a Community Project

Primary Text: *Ecclesiastes 4:9-12*. (Please stand with me for the reading of God’s word.)

9 Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. 10 For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow. But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up! 11 Again, if two lie together, they keep warm, but how can one keep warm alone? 12 And though a man might prevail against one who is alone, two will withstand him—a threefold cord is not quickly broken.

SSS: “Christian Growth is a Community Project.”

Introduction: It is widely believed that these words were written by King Solomon, the Son of King David, the builder of God’s Temple in Jerusalem, who, outside of Jesus, was known as both the wisest and richest man in all of human history. I believe we too would be wise to heed his advice today. “Two are better than one, ...” Why would Solomon say such a thing? I believe the Lord in His Sovereignty wished to convey a message to us today about community?

The title of our talk today is, “Christian Growth is a Community Project.”, which begs us to look at the word “Fellowship”. When we think of the word Fellowship, what usually comes to mind? Potlucks? Movie nights? Bible Studies? The concept of Koinonia the Bible gives us goes much deeper than just sharing a meal, or time in the Word together and occupying the same physical space. This implies a deep community, the kind of community we see in Acts 2:44, “And all who believed were together and had all things in common.”. The Bible tells us it was a community of “All who believed”, that means people that loved Jesus and viewed that love as the basis for their entire existence. A community that lived life together, that didn’t live separate and ineffectual lives. And a community that had all things in common, they shared what they had as anyone had need, they took what they needed and nothing more, and they bared one another’s

burdens in love. This was a deeply Spiritual Fellowship that permeated every aspect of their lives. The kind of fellowship that stems from a completely new and transformed life. When we meet Jesus, He draws us into this kind of Fellowship with the Body. It wasn't just to restore us to right and reconciled relationship with God the Father that Jesus died, although that was accomplished too, but rather Jesus died to build His Church, to create a new people, the Children of God (1John 1:12). This people that Jesus died to establish, were made to be a community of people who put their trust only in Jesus for everything. The text today leads us to ask the following practical questions:

What is Koinonia or “Spiritual Fellowship” and why is it important? (Ecclesiastes 4:9-12)
(TC pg. 39-47)

1.) (John 15:1-17) Spiritual Fellowship– is the common life we share in Jesus Christ.

Jesus tells us that He is the vine and we are the branches, and that we are to abide in Him and He in us (John 15:4-5). We are grafted into the vine (Jesus) from the moment of belief. For those of us who are not professional horticulturist, let me explain, when growing grapes, sometimes the branch, due to drought or some other cause, would snap and break off. So, to save the potentially fruitful branch the farmer would graft it back into the vine, by cutting a sliver into the healthy vine stalk and meshing a freshly cut open portion of the branch to the stalk. Thus, allowing the water and other nutrients from the living vine to flow into what was a dead branch bringing it back to life. This is how we are tapped into the power of the Holy Spirit from the moment of belief. We are not tacked onto the vine with a nail, to where outwardly we look to be a part of the vine but share no life with it. Rather we are grafted into the life that flows from the vine that sustains us and produces growth and the bearing of fruit. Very clearly, Jesus tells us through the Apostle John that, “... **apart from me you can do nothing**” (John 15:5). Without Jesus we can do nothing. We can try to walk this Christian life out in our own flesh, and for a time you may have some measure of success in fighting indwelling sin, you may be able to put aside your pride and selfishness, to hide your envious and greedy tendencies, or even stop

being angry with every other Lubbock driver road, at least for a while. But if all you are doing is modifying your behavior in order to win God's approval, or to make your spouse and family happy. If you're not filled with grief over your sin, and longing for Jesus to come and set you free. If behavioral modification is our only goal, Jesus says that we are nothing more than a white washed tomb and dressing up a corpse. Jesus goes on to say, "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you." How has Jesus loved us? Paul tells us that Jesus demonstrated His love for us by laying down His life. We cannot lay our lives down for those we are not in relational community with. I love being a Dad. It is by far and away one of my favorite blessings the Lord has given me. Like every Parent in this room, if Jackson or Mahalia were running into the street and I saw a car coming, without question or hesitation I'm pushing them out of the way and taking the hit by the car. Dying is one of the most natural of activities that human beings engage in, everyone in this room at some point in their life will die. That's easy, but what's not easy is getting up three to five times in the night to change diapers, because of severe diaper rash, or dealing with a Colicky kid, with tender love, care and grace. That's hard. To put our needs, desires, and agendas aside and place their needs above our own, that is an unnatural act for Human beings. We must be connected to the Body of Christ to carry out Christ's command to love one another, and we must abide in Him in order to accomplish that love. Jesus is the end and His power is the means by which we enter into and maintain Spiritual Fellowship with one another.

- 2.) Spiritual Fellowship is a preferred status- "Two are better than one", this passage was used in the sermon at Narci and I's wedding. It is a passage often quoted at weddings, but the context of the text here refers to relational fellowship. The text is not meant to be used, as some have, to promote being married over being single as a preferred status of living. Nor does the Bible condemn marriage in favor of singleness, but rather the text is promoting Biblical fellowship". It's speaking to the relational side of Spiritual Fellowship. It is saying that it is better to be in community, than to not be in community. Two are better than one. When God created all of the world, he said that each thing made was good, and everything was good, until he saw that Man was

alone. God said, “It is not good that man should be alone...”. God made Man for community, for fellowship, and for partnership. Why? The text tells us that, “they have a good reward for their toil.”. We are to be in partnership with one another so that our “toil” or work will receive greater reward. Can we do things on our own? Yes. But God is saying the rewards will be greater when we work together. In working together, we have a share in the reward, and a share in the burdens. This common life also consists of sharing material possessions as well. The Bible tells us that anyone who has the world’s goods and sees a Brother in need of them and withholds it from them, the love of God cannot abide in them (1John 3:17). Koinonia is about the communal sharing of burdens and in so doing, fulfilling the law of Christ (Gal. 6:2). And Also,

- 3.) This Community is for our encouragement- “For if they fall one will lift up his *fellow*.” This word translated means associate, companion, or fellow worshippers. The best part of Spiritual Fellowship is getting to encourage our Brothers and Sisters in Christ. The assurance we have from our communion with Christ, should lead us to encourage each other daily. The writer of Hebrews says it this way, “**24And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, 25not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.**” How do we stir up one another to love and good works? The writer of Hebrews answers the question in the very next sentence, by NOT neglecting to meet together! What does this look like played out in our daily lives?

What does this Spiritual Fellowship look like walked out? (TC pg. 54-58)

Jerry Bridges, author of more than one bestseller, wrote in his word study of Koinonia, called “**True Community**”. Spiritual Fellowship plays itself out in the life of the Christian in the following for ways:

- 1.) Sharing Biblical Truth-(Proverbs 27:17)- Application and Revelation (not knowledge) “It is the application of Scripture, not just the academic knowledge of it that makes it fruitful in our lives.” When I first started my training in Preaching, I was very zealous

about sharing the wonderful knowledge I gained through my studies. But in my zeal to share my new-found information, I neglected what the Holy Spirit was showing me in those Scriptures. The most important piece of any sermon is the revelation of the truth of the Gospel, the impact that truth has on our lives. When we meet as the Body of Christ, we share the life transforming power of the Gospel with one another. We're supposed to encourage each other by sharing what the Lord has been teaching us and doing in us. This might shock some of you, but I used to hate people. When I first came to this Church, I thought everybody was a bunch of Kool-Aid drinking weirdos. I didn't like anyone except Narci, and that's because she's pretty, and sweet, and just crazy enough to think I was cute. But the more I came, the more I hung out with Men like Brother Ron Weller, Pastor Marc, Pastor David, and Brother Daryl, a funny thing occurred. As I read the Scriptures, and had the truth within them explained to me, the Lord changed my heart. Before I knew it, the once cold heart of stone once filled with distrust, anxiety, and disdain for human beings, was replaced with a heart that was deeply moved with compassion for the the image and likeness of Almighty God that I saw in other people. This is one of the ways the Lord sanctifies us and changes us into the image of His Son. Charles Spurgeon said it best, that we can study and know all the doctrines, but not one of them will save us. Only knowing Christ can do that. Information plus revelation leads to transformation. Sharing Biblical Truth changes lives.

2.) Openness with One Another-(James 5:16, 1John 1:5-7) confession to repentance

James tells us to "confess our sins to one another and pray for one another, that we may be healed." Why are we to confess our sins to one another? So that they may be lorded over our heads, and used to make us feel more guilt than we already do? NO, so that we may be HEALED. Listen, some of you here this morning may be carrying a burden of harboring unforgiveness towards someone in your past, some of you may hurt someone else and it is eating you up. Confession sets us free from the bondage our sin places us under and brings healing to the Believer. Spiritual Fellowship requires a type of intimacy that allows us to share our struggles openly without fear of condemnation. Now, don't go to some random person here this morning after service and start confessing all your junk to them. Ok, that is foolish at best and dangerous at

worse. You need to seek out and establish good relational bonds of trust before doing that, and we don't do that with just any Believer. The Puritans used to pray most fervently that God would send them what they called a "bosom friend" or as my wife calls them "heart-friends". A friend with which they could share absolutely everything. They begged God for this kind of friend, because they knew the truth that Paul shares with us in **1 Corinthians 10:13**, "no temptation has seized us except that which is common to Man." We need to ask God for this type of friend and when we find him or her be willing to open our lives to them.

3.) Accountability-(Col. 3:16, Eph. 5:21)-Admonition and Mutual Submission

I don't know about you all, but this word sends chills down my spine, if I'm being completely honest. Back several years ago there were small groups of people in the Church who would get together called, "accountability groups", where we would share just enough of our struggles to satisfy the "need for confession" to one another, but only about the sins that weren't "too bad", like cussing or losing my temper behind the wheel. These groups rarely if ever led to genuine repentance and heart change in my experience, not because they are silly, useless, or wrong, but because the people engaged in them (myself in particular) had no real concept of what mutual submission and admonition meant or is even supposed to look like. **Colossians 3:16**, tells us to **let the Word of Christ dwell in us richly, teaching and admonishing on another in all wisdom**, but what does that look like? Partially the singing of songs and worshipping together, but it also requires mutual submission. A submission we are to give one another out of reverence for Christ (Eph. 5:21). This submission is crucial in order to have a discipling relationship, because discipleship is always a two-way street between Believers. Some of you maybe thinking, "Man, I have nothing to offer anyone in a discipling relationship." And I'm here to tell you that notion couldn't be further from the truth. Whether you've been walking with Jesus for 3-5 decades or 3-5 days, you have been uniquely and specifically placed by God for the building up of other saints. New believers bring enthusiasm and zeal to older believers, while older believers bring wisdom and insight to budding new Christians. New believers tend to look on with fresh eyes, and say things like, "DUDE, did you know this was in there?" While we may have read a particular passage 100 times before, through the

encouragement of enthusiasm the new believer brings, the Holy Spirit gives us eyes to see the Word of God anew. Mutual submission is a requirement of all Christ followers and necessary for training in the pursuit of holiness and humility.

Admonishment in fellowship is simply the reminding of one beggar by another, of where the good bread really is (*Pregnant Pause*). It's a pointing of each other back to Jesus for all our needs of sustenance and hope. Proverbs tells us that, "As Iron sharpens Iron, so one man sharpens another." (Proverbs 27:17) This is how that sharpening is done.

- 4.) Praying Together-(Eph. 6:18)- **Fruits of righteousness are preceded by and proceeded from prayer.** When I first became a Christian one of the things that I often felt awkward about was praying with other Christians. It felt wrong in a sense to do something so intimate with people I barely knew. But as Christians there is no other activity which we should so willingly, quickly, and routinely engage in than praying together. There is real life-altering, world-changing power in the prayers of the Body of Christ. I stand before you today as physically healed and spiritually healthy follower of Jesus because of the power of prayer. For example, I used to smoke for about 15 years, and on occasion during some stressful times up to 5 packs in a day. I struggled for years trying to quit, looking to pharmaceutical drugs, hypnosis, and the like. But I never saw a break through, until I was prayed for. A group of men at the Men's retreat I was at, laid hands on me and prayed for me. Not long after I was no longer even vaping. Prayer works, it sets captives free, it breaks strongholds, it binds together the community of Believers, and it is the catalyst for true Koinonia.

Who do we enter into Spiritual Fellowship with? (2 Tim. 3:8-13) (TC pg. 59)

The intimate nature of Spiritual Fellowship requires good discernment in determining who we enter into this kind of relationship with. All believers are called to be disciples, so, the question isn't do I find someone to be this kind of friends with, it's who do I find? Jerry Bridges offers up the following criteria to aid us this task:

- 1.) Demonstrate hunger for the Lord, His Word, and loving others.
- 2.) Objective Empathy, to identify with your personal struggles and temptations without pity
- 3.) Confidentiality

- 4.) Willing to commit to your spiritual welfare
- 5.) A mature and humble recognition that they don't have all the answers, but willing to search Scripture
- 6.) Willing to call you on your junk and not just let you get away with it. Above all that we need to be willing to hear it and change as a result. Bosom friends are not easy to come by, they are a rare and precious gift. We should seek these types of relationships with sincere Christ-seeking, God-fearing, People-loving, Christians who are patiently awaiting the same thing we are, the completion of the work the Lord has begun in us.

Why do we need Fellowship to help us grow Spiritually?

“¹¹Again, if two lie together, they keep warm, but how can one keep warm alone? ¹²And though a man might prevail against one who is alone, two will withstand him—a threefold cord is not quickly broken.” –Ecclesiastes 4:12

1.) The text tells us that Koinonia is a way for the Believer to keep warm (v.11). In Jesus' day, often times people would have to travel great distances, and in so doing they would be stuck many miles from any town where lodging was available. So, they would lie together to keep warm, the text isn't referring to lying together as one does with their spouse. But it does reflect the intimate sustaining nature of Fellowship. Fellowship is needed for spiritual growth because it provides something in that particular moment that cannot be given elsewhere. I need relationships with other Believers, not just my wife and kids. Although, my Spouse and Children are used to grow me spiritually, there are ways they simply cannot. Ginger Sharp is used to point me to Jesus and remind me of my desperate need for him in the work the Lord has set before me. Caleb Daniel has been used, and I pray continues to be used by God to challenge my preconceived notions on culture, people, and doctrine. Without these relationships I cannot be molded into a complete image of Jesus. I will lack something. Paul tells us in Colossians 1:28, that the reason we teach, rebuke, warn, and proclaim Jesus in Fellowship is to present everyone mature in Christ.

We cannot be made mature in Christ without being in fellowship with other Believers.

2.) Secondly, the text tells us the Koinonia is safeguard against attack (v.12).

Because we live in a broken, sinful, and fallen world we need one another for protection. When the Colonists came to America, they found a very harsh environment. The winters were extremely difficult to survive, and they found the natives who lived here to be less than hospitable. As a result, they formed communities, built houses and walls to keep out would be attackers and to make it easier to keep a watchful eye one another. As the community was a protection for their very lives, so too is Biblical Fellowship for the Believer. Spiritual Fellowship amongst the Saints is part of the God ordained Fortress created and meant for the protection of the Believer. We need community to withstand the attacks of the enemy.

3.) Lastly, we see fellowship is held together by a third party. The author strays from his original line of thought at the end of verse 12, almost as if mid-thought he discovered something that intrigued him. Some sort of valuable insight for us to take hold of and use for our growth. He says, “**-A threefold cord is not quickly broken.**” As I said earlier this morning, this passage was used at Narci and I’s wedding. It was a beautiful ceremony and the happiest day of my life. In weddings I’ve seen couples use unity candles, sand in a jar, and even the washing of feet to portray the uniqueness of their bond. Narci and I chose to tie together a three-strand cord. See when the officiator of our wedding was conducting pre-marital counseling, he made sure that Narci and I knew that our Marriage was not always going to be sunshine and rainbows, and truthfully up to that point in our relationship, it had been blissful to say the least. We hadn’t experienced any real hardships relationally speaking. But he knew from experience that eventually we would have some trials together. That there would come a time when we didn’t like me very much. That there would be late nights and early morning diaper changes, and days when one or both of us got sick and needed the other to bare the load of the family. He knew that when those times

came, puppy love, and the affections we had for each other in that moment wouldn't be enough to sustain us as a couple. We would need an inexhaustible source of love, compassion, mercy, and grace. God is the only inexhaustible resource we have. He never runs out of kindness, love, and grace. He is a bottomless well for all those who are in Christ Jesus. Listen, fellowship is about being in community with other Believers who are human. There are going to be times when we get it wrong, when we sin against one another, and need to repent. Spiritual Fellowship requires us to learn how to resolve conflict in a way that maintains the unifying bond of love we have in Jesus. Paul tells us that Jesus proved His love for us in this, that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Jesus death brought about our reconciliation with God the Father, we are restored to right standing because of Jesus. Our lives, interactions, conversations, and the way we resolve conflict should mirror what Jesus has done for us. This is the rope Narci and I tied together on September 21st, 2013. In a moment we are going to partake in the Lord's table together. I want you to see the importance of the symbolism here this morning. The table consists of three main components, you may be thinking, 3? There's the bread which is Jesus' Body broken for our reconciliation, and there's the cup of the new covenant in Jesus' blood that is poured out as the eternal propitiation for our sins, but where's the third component? The third component is us. We bring communion to the table, without our involvement in fellowship, without us coming to the table together giving thanks and glory to God for what He has done through His Son, there is no communion. Without the active engagement in the Fellowship of the Saints, of the Believers, the elements are just bread and juice, they don't mean anything. The Bible says that for the Joy set before Him, Christ died. We are that joy set before Him. This morning if you haven't placed all your trust in the Lord Jesus for your salvation, we invite you to do that now. The Bible says today is the day of salvation, don't wait. Don't leave this place today without putting your trust in Him. It's not too late, you haven't gone too far, or done anything so wretched that his blood isn't thick enough to cover. I want everyone here this morning, if you have made a decision to follow Jesus today, or maybe you've been following

Jesus for a while, and you know you're not seeing that life-altering, transformation of the Gospel in your life, and you want to see God moving in your life. Will you make a commitment to the Lord, right now, to walk in spiritual fellowship with the Body of Christ, and begin to learn what that means?

If I could have my communion (**have the communion slide up during this part**) helpers come up now, please? Please stand with me, as we prepare to take the Lord's supper together.

“**23**For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, **24** and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, “This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” **25**In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.” **26** For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.”

Closing Prayer: Father, I thank you for your community of Saints. I praise your name for the blessing of being in Spiritual Fellowship with your Body through Jesus. I thank you for the folks here this morning that have made a commitment to honor their relationship with you by committing to be a part of this Body. You are the author and perfecter of our faith, and it is through and your strength that we walk out the Christian life, grounded in the knowledge that you who began a work in us, is faithful to complete it. In Jesus Name, Amen. Come partake of the elements.

Primary Text: *Ecclesiastes 4:9-10.*

Supporting Texts: 2 Cor. 6:14-18, Hebrews 10:23-26 Galatians 1:6, Proverbs 27:17, James 5:16, 1Cor. 10:13, 1 John 1:3-10, Mathew 18:20,

Chaber –(Kha-var)-Hebrew for fellow, companion, friend, worshiper.

Koinonia–(Koi-No-Nia)-Greek for Fellowship, Share, association, participation, beneficiation, or social intercourse

