

FELLOWSHIP

Week 1 | Ancient | Acts 2:42

Acts 2:42-47

“They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.”

Deeper Dive

The book of Acts begins with Pentecost and the coming of the Holy Spirit, as promised by Jesus before He ascended to heaven. Soon after, we see thousands coming to faith in Jesus, and the birth of the early Christian Church. Acts 2:42-47 describes the Spiritual Practices adopted by followers of Jesus, as this early body of Christ forms into what we know as the modern church.

Day 1 - What is Fellowship?

If you grew up in church, you have probably heard the word “fellowship”. Most churches have a “fellowship hall”, and depending on your tradition, this might bring up memories of potluck dinners, folding chairs, tasty deserts, and sometimes questionable casseroles. However, the original term for “fellowship” meant so much more than a place to eat Mac and Cheese. If Acts 2:42 says that the early church “devoted” themselves to “fellowship”, what exactly did the early church intend for fellowship to truly mean?

In the original greek text, the word “fellowship” was Koinonia. This word refers to a deep partnership or community that shares in communion with each other. This more accurately translates to: living in agreement with, united in purpose, and serving alongside. This is an active and relational term, not a reference to an occasional activity or a stationary place. When we read these verses in Acts 2, we see a community of people that are devoted to maturing in their faith, sharing everything they have, and loving each other in a way that almost seems heavenly. This is true Godly fellowship that involves authenticity & vulnerability through “sincere” hearts.

As we read about fellowship in scripture, it’s expressed on several levels. First, we see the fellowship between God & Himself through the trinity (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit). Since we are made in the image of God, we are also made with a natural desire for this type of intimate fellowship or community. We were never meant to journey through life alone. We were meant to have Koinona with God and also with a community of believers, through the body of Christ, or the church. This type of true devoted fellowship can only happen through the power of Jesus in your life and through the fruits of the Holy Spirit.

Daily Reflection:

- When you think about Godly fellowship, or Koinonia, do you feel “devoted” to this area in your life? Think about this question with both God and with other believers as we are called to do?
- Do you currently treat fellowship as an optional, or essential practice in your daily Spiritual life? Why, why not?

Deeper Dive

Additional scripture to meditate on this week.

- **Genesis 1:26-27** ~Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them."
- **Genesis 2:18** ~The Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him."
- **Deuteronomy 31:6** ~Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the Lord your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you."
- **1 John 1:3-4** ~We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. We write this to make our joy complete.
- **2 Corinthians 13:14** ~May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all..

Day 2 - Made for Fellowship

God in His very nature embodies perfect fellowship, or Koinonia. Reading these verses in Genesis, it clearly states that God, in His mysterious ways, has eternally existed as a community within Himself through the trinity: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. He is ONE God, with 3 equal parts that exist in perfect communal fellowship with one another. This is one of those parts of our faith that can be hard to fathom. How can God be 3 separate beings, but still be one God? In our limited human capacity, it can be hard for us to fully understand the awesomeness of who God truly is! Many times we falsely feel that we need to understand something fully in order to believe it. However, we can know and have total faith in who God says He is, even though it's hard to fully understand. (Note: If you have doubts, questions, or need more help understanding this...please reach out to our ministry team, we would love to connect with you - connect@gumchurch.com)

We also know from scripture that God is fully complete on His own. He didn't create mankind because He needed our fellowship, or because He was lonely or bored. God chose to create us and chooses to have fellowship with us. He chose to make us in His image, and in His likeness. This doesn't mean that we are like "mini-gods", this simply means that we share attributes of God's nature and character. He gave us free will, intelligence, emotion, creativity, and a soul that desires community & fellowship. He created us to desire deep relational fellowship, both with himself and with others. In fact, the only time that God says something wasn't good during all of creation is when He says "It is not good for man to be alone". God knew that even though Adam was literally walking in the Garden with God daily, He also needed human companionship.

Our desire for fellowship is a reflection of God's very nature within us. We all have a God-given, God-breathed desire for fellowship both with Himself and with each other. No matter if you are an introvert or an extrovert, no matter what your enneagram number or what your Meyers Briggs tests says...we all need connection & community expressed in our many different & unique ways. We were truly made for it!

Daily Reflection:

- Where in your life do you see the nature of God coming through in your own desire for relationship and fellowship? Do you see those desires as true Spiritual needs? Why, or why not?
- Are there areas in your life where you feel alone? Pray and ask God to reveal His presence to you in this area of your life, and also what steps you could take this week to prayerfully reach out to someone for support?

Deeper Dive

Additional scripture to meditate on this week.

- **Matthew 6:33** ~ But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.
- **Matthew 22:37-38** ~ Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment.
- **1 John 1:6-7** ~ If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth. 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[a] sin.
- **John 15:1-6** ~ "I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing."

Day 3 - Fellowship with Christ

When we look at Jesus' perfect example of how to live a faithful life here on earth, we see that even the Son of God didn't walk this earth alone. Jesus was in constant fellowship both with the Father and with a community of believers through His disciples & followers. This is exactly the way we are called to journey through our faith.

When we look at Jesus' example of how He maintained consistent fellowship with God, we see daily practices of prayer, studying scripture, and humble surrender to what the Father asks of Him.

Jesus explains the type of fellowship that we are called to have with Him and the Father in John 15. In these verses Jesus emphasizes the importance of "abiding" stating: "I am the vine; you are the branches. The one who remains in Me, and I in him, will bear much fruit. For apart from Me you can do nothing". Abiding isn't just an occasional time together, or just a Sunday morning routine, or a potluck dinner kind of fellowship. Abiding is living a lifestyle of constant fellowship with Him and the Father. Abiding is literally defined as: a continuous intimate relationship, or a stable presence that remains unchanged over time. This is the type of relationship we are called to have with Christ. He promises that if we abide and "remain in Him" then He will also remain with us. He also promises that we will bear fruit from this type of abiding fellowship with Him.

It's important to remember that our relationship or fellowship with Christ comes first. It is through this that we receive the reconciliation and forgiveness that allows us this abiding closeness with God. It is only through God's strength and the fruits of the Spirit that we can have true & authentic Koinonia with Him or with others. Jesus emphasizes this in Matthew when He tells His disciples to seek first His kingdom. We can never do what God has called us to do in our own strength. He knows that we will need Him to be able to accomplish what He has set out for us.

Daily Reflection:

- Pray and ask God to reveal the spaces in your life that you are not bearing fruit. Where are you exhausted? Where do you feel like giving up? Where do you feel alone?
- Pray and ask if this an area that you are trying to bear fruit on your own as a branch without the vine. Is this an area you are operating without the Gardner?
- Finally, pray and ask God if this is an area that needs pruning, or if this is an area that needs to be re-attached to the vine? Invite the touch of the Master Gardner, and remember that the Master Gardner always knows best, certainly much more than a branch. Allow Him into your garden and surrender to His guidance, even if it includes a little healthy pruning.

Deeper Dive

Additional scripture to meditate on this week.

• **Ecclesiastes 4:9-12** ~Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor: If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up. Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone? Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.

• **Philippians 1:3-6** ~ I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

• **Proverbs 27:17** ~As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another.

• **Philippians 2: 2-4** ~then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.

Day 4 - Fellowship with Others

Throughout scripture, history, and even through scientific evidence we know that humans need each other. This is why solitary confinement is often considered a form of torture. Food, shelter and companionship or love are often seen as the basic needs for life on earth. When we look at this human companionship through the lens of our faith journey, let's look at what God tells us about being in fellowship with others?

As we talked about earlier this week, Acts 2 says that the early church was "devoted" to fellowship with each other. In fact, it is listed along with other Spiritual Practices that we are called to have. God calls us to surround ourselves with other believers that encourage us, hold us accountable, teach us, support us during times of suffering, pray for us, and mentor us in our faith. This Koinonia type of fellowship is more than just sitting next to someone on Sunday morning, or talking to them occasionally at church events, and it's even more than hanging out and having fun together socially. Godly Koinonia is a consistent deep and intimate fellowship with each other that is rooted & grounded in growing your faith, maturing in Christ and serving God alongside of each other. The same deep relationship you are called to have with God, we are also called to have with each other. This is what the scriptures mean by "the body of Christ".

Of course, in our modern world of work, kids, activities, and very individualized schedules, how do we experience this daily practice of true intimate fellowship with other believers? We certainly can't expect this to happen in the context of a big Sunday worship service of 100+ people, or in a busy church lobby. True fellowship requires the intentional intimacy of a few. Even Jesus himself had a few close disciples that experienced daily intentional Koinonia with. This is why we encourage everyone to join a discipling small group at Gainesville Church. Our discipleship groups of 10-15 people strive to: dig deeper into the sermon message through our study guides, encourage each other to read the Bible daily, discuss & ask questions about what they have learned, commit to praying for each other and authentically walking through the joys and suffering of life together. Small groups are where the Acts 2 fellowship happen in the modern church, and this is the spiritual practice that God calls us to in order to truly mature in our faith journey.

Daily Reflections:

- If you don't have a group to experience true Koinonia with, what are the barriers keeping you from this type of fellowship?
- Pray and ask God to work in your life, schedule, or heart to remove the barriers so that you can experience this important Spiritual Practice in your faith journey. For more info on our discipleship groups - reach out to our Discipleship Director: meloniep@gumchruch.com.

Deeper Dive

Additional scripture to meditate on this week.

- **Romans 12:10** ~Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves.

- **1 Thessalonians 5:11**

~Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.

- **Hebrews 10: 19-25**

~Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

Day 5 - Fellowship is Essential

Once we realize that God Himself is fellowship, that we were made in His image for fellowship, that we need fellowship with Christ to make all this possible, then we can begin to fully understand God's call for us to have authentic Godly fellowship with others. This week we have learned that fellowship isn't just something that God would like us to do, it's essential to our spiritual journey and maturity in our faith.

Here are some practical ways that you and your family can begin to practice growing in fellowship in the New Year:

1. Fellowship with God:

- **Read His Word:** *Prioritize consistency over quantity.* Commit to reading in the Word daily, no matter if it's one chapter or 4.
- **Talk to God:** *Prioritize honesty over perfectionism.* Don't worry about what you think you "should" say. Instead, just be honest, give God your raw unfiltered emotions, name your fears and brokenness, ask for His forgiveness and grace, and spend time thanking Him for the ways He cared for you today.
- **Listen to God:** *Prioritize listening over speaking.* Spend intentional time listening to God. Even if you don't hear anything yet, don't give up. You will learn to hear His voice.
- **Surrender to God:** *Prioritize surrender over control* (or trying to fix it yourself). Invite God into your life and intentionally give every area over to Him in full and complete surrender. Rest in the freedom that putting Him on the throne can bring.

2. Fellowship with others:

- **Prioritize Rhythm:** Make it a priority in your family's schedule to join a consistently meeting discipling small group (reach out to meloniep@gumchurch.com if you need help finding one). Create a consistent rhythm of committing to meet together, read in the Word, discuss your faith, pray together, and support each other through life's struggles.
- **Prioritize Presence:** Prioritize presence over performance. Commit to coming to small group EVEN IF: you are tired, or overwhelmed, haven't had time to read that week, struggling with brokenness, grieving, or even doubting your faith. True fellowship grows through authenticity, not false perfectionism or fake impressiveness. Truly do life and strive to grow in faith together. Let others IN, let others help, and let it be okay not to be okay. THIS is true koinonia!