

MAN IN THE MIRROR BIBLE STUDY
SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES - A MAN AND FELLOWSHIP
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Every day I have conversations, interactions, you do to, that are necessary for me to survive because without these interactions and without these conversations, I just don't get enough on my own to get through the day. This is a series on a lot of the spiritual disciplines that we've been talking about and a lot of them can be done in solitude. Some of them can only be done in solitude. This morning we are going to talk about the discipline of fellowship. Many of the things we've talked about can be done in solitude or in fellowship, Bible Study, prayer, worship and things we'll be talking about like service. Sometimes you get it; sometimes you give it.

One of the really nice things about coming to this place, this Bible Study, on Friday mornings is that no matter what has happened to you during the week or what is lacking in your life, if you will open yourself up here at the Bible Study, you can get what you need. You don't have to go away empty. You can go away empty because it's a two-way street. But, we are practicing among other things here by being together, the discipline of fellowship. I want to talk to you about this discipline this morning, and what I kind of want to do is talk about why we need each other and what are we supposed to do together.

So, we're going to talk about the discipline of fellowship. What are some other words for fellowship? Is fellowship like a masculine word? Well, maybe or maybe not. I hope after today it will be a little bit more masculine. What are some other words that go along with it? Gathering, camaraderie, relationship, brotherhood, hanging out, hang time, koinonia (oh, spiritual guy over here). What does koinonia mean? How about that? What else - getting together? Okay, so you have the idea. Now, we want to look at why we do this, then I want to talk to you about two things we should do to work this out, and I'm going to use the word, just so I can use two "e" words, "exhort" and "encourage." I'm not going to have us talk about anything. We're going to look at God's word, and the Bible is going to talk about these things, and we'll try to flush it out.

So, why do we need each other, and why do we need other people? Let's look at 1 Corinthians: Chapter 12, Verse 12. "The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body." Now the word "body" in the Greek is used in many different ways, but here it basically means community. The community is a unit although it is made up of many parts. So, we're a community, any ecclesia, any gathering, any assembly of Christians is a gathering of the body. "The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all of its parts are many, they form one body." It's interesting here. You're a part, you're a part, and you're part of a part (just kidding). You're not a body; you're a part. That's the point, and so it is with Christ. We are all baptized by one spirit into one body whether Jews or Greeks or slaves or free, and we were all given the one spirit to drink. Now, the body is made up of not one part, but of many. One body, many parts; that's what it's about.

Then in Verse 15, "If the foot should say, 'Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,' it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body." If my hand started talking and said, "Hi, I'm not part of your body," that doesn't mean anything. It's still part of my body. If you say, "Well, you know, I'm not going back to that group over there, I'm not part of that group anymore." Yes, you are. Just saying something that it's so, doesn't make it so. I don't care how mad you walk out of here, no matter what I say, I don't care how mad you get, when you walk out of here, you are still part of the body. That's just the way it is. "And if the ear should say, 'Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,' it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body." In other words, you can't elect out of the body. Now I thought about bringing my machete in here this morning to ask if anybody wanted to be elected out. We could have elected you out.

Verse 17: "If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted us to be." So you see here the necessity of different parts. Did you ever wonder, "Why can't I be a man with a servant heart like Jim here?" Or "Why don't I encourage people like Bill?" Or "Why when they're asking for volunteers to set up the tables, why do I go the other way, and why does Ed make a beeline over there? What's that all about?" Well, we all have different parts to play in this body. Verse 19: "If they were all one part, where would the body be? As it is there are many parts, but one body."

Verse 21: "The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I don't need you!'" Now this is different. We saw the necessity of different parts above, now we see the necessity of each other. "The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I don't need you!' And the head cannot say to the feet, 'I don't need you!' On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable." Try to walk without a little toe. "And the parts we think are less honorable we treat with special honor." You ever notice how often the behind the scenes, quiet person that's never upfront is the one who gets special recognition? You ever notice that? It's because it's just a biblical idea. "And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has combined the members of the body," that's us, "and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other." That's what's supposed to be happening at our little tables - all you different parts. Each table is an assembly, it's a fellowship, it's a body, part of a bigger body.

Verse 26: "If one part" at your table "suffers, every part" at your table "suffers with it; if one part" at your table "is honored, every part rejoices with it." That's biblical Christianity. Now you are the body of Christ and each one of you is a part of it. In the church, or ecclesia, if you will, the gathering, the assembly, or the word "church." I use the word "church" a lot. Church is people, right? It's more than just people. It's the assembly of the people. It's when the body comes together. That's what the assembly is, what the church is, the ecclesia. "And in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those have gifts of healing, those who help others, those with gifts of administration, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues." Different parts; one body.

So, why do we need each other? Because I don't have everything I need. I can't be a whole person without you. Here's the big idea this morning. In his wisdom, God has not given any of us everything we need; instead he chose to give us each other. In his wisdom, God has not given any of us everything we need; instead he chose to give us each other. I have gaps, you have gaps, and together we fill each other's gaps. That's the cosmic order of things. Now is this true that we don't have everything we need?

Several years ago a friend of mine named Isaac told me that every day he called his mother, his elderly mother. I remember thinking to myself, "You know I could never do that. I could never call my mother every day. It does not compute with me that I would call a parent every day. Then my mama got sick, and there I was calling her every day. So be careful about saying something isn't so or could never happen.

Now my mom passed away three and one-half months ago, and to be honest with you just within the last couple of weeks her face is beginning to fade. I'm having trouble remembering what her voice sounded like already after three and one-half months. My dad feels this way, too, and you want to know what my dad is? My dad is lonely. He misses her because God in His wisdom does not give any of us everything we need. Instead He chose to give us each other. Part of that was this mate for him so he's lonely. Now I'm calling my dad every day. Why, because we need each other. We're the body. No, we're not the body; we're parts. We're just parts, indispensable parts of each other. Together we're a body. We need each other. Gaps - everyone has them. You have parts, I have parts, and together we're whole.

Tom Skinner used to say, "The most powerful force in the world is a relationship." Relationships are built on the foundation of Christian love. We have something, as believers, those of us who are and some of you are here investigating Christianity, but those of you who have already embraced Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, we have a special one another bond in the love of Jesus Christ. There is a fellowship that is available to us, and you know that if you have been in another city, if you've been on an airplane, in a taxi cab, you strike up a conversation with somebody, there is a distance between you. If you're a believer, and you happen to find out that they are also a believer in the same Jesus Christ, what happens? Bam, fellowship! Let's get a more masculine way of saying of that though. Fellowship happens. There is an instant connection with that person because your part connects with their part and the body shows up.

Now flip over to Hebrews: Chapter 10, Verse 24. I love fellowship. What is it we are supposed to do together? This could be the subject of several books, but kind of as an overview here, we read the following: "And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds." Spur on, or provoke, if you like the King James Version, or challenge or incite or inspire. The Greek word could mean to stimulate another person to love and good deeds.

Verse 25: "Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing..." Oh, you know what I'm talking about because we've all done this haven't we? We have all withdrawn, at some point or another. Every one of us in this room has done this, haven't we? We have said, "I'm not part of that body. I am a free agent. I do my own thing," and what happens? You wither up into a little pile of dust because we need each other. The parts need each other. So it says, "Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another - and all the more as you see the Day approaching." So we see here the idea of spurring one another on, exhort, and we see the idea of encouragement. So the two of the things we're supposed to do when we're together is exhort or challenge each other and to encourage each other. Sometimes you are giving it; sometimes you need to get it. Right?

One of the men in the Bible Study and I were talking a few weeks ago, and he is out of work and has been out of work. We spent about 30 minutes on the telephone talking about different options. About half way through the conversation I said, "Let me ask you a question," because he was sleeping in, he was discouraged and wasn't going out on interviews and wasn't aggressively looking for a position. Half way through the conversation I stopped him and said, "What do you want here? Do you want a hug or a kick in the pants?" He said, "You know what I really need is a kick in the pants." I said, "If you want I'll hold you accountable." I said, "Call me at four o'clock tomorrow afternoon and let me know how many employment interviews you have." That was cutting the conversation short, but that was the bottom line. I just asked him to call me and let me know what had happened. Sometimes, even when we're down, what we really need is somebody to exhort us, to spur us on.

Some of us here this morning have been at swords with our wives all week long - cross words. One guy I work with was telling me that for the first time in their marriage this week they slept in separate rooms. This is where you solve that problem. You can't do it if you don't open yourself up, but this is where you solve that problem. You bring your part in contact with the other parts, you take your gap, you let them fill it and exhort you to do the things you need to do. There are men who have not been getting along with their wives this week. Do they need insulation? Do they need to know what they need to do? Do they need to have someone sympathize with them over the fact, "Oh, I'm so sorry you yelled at your wife. Oh, poor baby." No, you need a kick in the pants, and that's what we're supposed to do when we're together. Also, when we're together, we need to encourage each other. Let us not give up meeting together; let us encourage one another. In His wisdom, God has not given any of us everything we need. Instead He chose to give us each other.

The other thing to do is encourage one and other, and this can happen through intentional and unintentional ways. I had no idea that I needed a drink of encouragement on Tuesday. I had no idea. You see this little plant right here? If you've been here for a while about two years ago, I brought this in. My wife gave me this green plant for my birthday instead of a Harley. This was the green Harley that I asked for. She said, "No motorcycle, but you can have this 'Harleydendra' plant here." Now, I love this plant, and I cannot believe that this plant is still alive. Do you want to know why it's still alive because I put it in a place where I come into regular contact with it, then when I see it looks like it's thirsty, I give it a drink. Now, if

you were to come up and examine this plant closely, you would see that all the tips of these leaves are brown. Why? Because what often happens is that by the time I notice it needs a drink, it is wilting.

Some of us here this morning notice that others are wilting. You really are wilting. You really need a drink of water, but you know what? Everyone else who came in here this morning needs a drink, too. The leaves are not wilted yet, but you still have to water the plant on a regular basis or what happens? You get all these little brown tips.

On Tuesday, I didn't know I needed a drink. I wasn't wilting. A young woman I work with gave a testimony about how God had been working in her life. I was overcome. I can't explain what was happening but I was overcome. I said, "How old are you?" She said, "I'm 24." I said, "My daughter is 26, and last weekend I met the in-laws, she's getting married in November." I heard her story of a father who had abandoned her. She grew up in a broken home and how God had redeemed all of that and used it all for good. I was so overwhelmed with God's grace to me and to my daughter. Do you know how close I came to being like her dad? Do you know how close you came to being like her dad? Do you know how close you came to abandoning everything? Do you appreciate the grace and the mercy of God? Hey, in my case, I quit high school. What kind of chance is that guy going to have? I had a brother who died from drugs and alcohol overdose. I have a brother who till he was almost 40 and never had a job for more than six months. I have another brother who is an alcoholic. What chance does that kid have?

So I took a drink, and I was encouraged, and I praised my God, and that's what we're supposed to do together. How do I know that Jesus is alive? Because I see Him in you. How do I know that Jesus really loves me? Because you really love me. I fill your gap, and you fill my gap. In His wisdom, God has not given any of us everything we need. Instead He chose to give us each other.

My purpose this morning is that you would believe this, and that you would become a believer in fellowship, that you would understand your part, and that you would play your part.

Let's pray:

Our dearest Father, Lord, when we look at the Trinity, we see that you are the Trinity: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. What fellowship you must have with each other. Lord, we pray that we would be believers in fellowship, and we would practice this discipline even when we don't feel like practicing especially when we are wilting. Even when we are not that we would drink of each other and give each other something to drink. We ask this in the power and the name of Jesus. Amen.

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