

# Friendship and Fellowship

What's this thing called "fellowship"? For years I sat in pews. I sat next to people multiple times a week for years, while never really knowing them. I've also sat in living rooms encircled by believers and we called this "fellowship".

Certain words carry such a religious overtone with them that it can be hard to discern what they actually mean. Christians have nearly created their own language as a type of detachment from the world. I remember at one time having this notion that what the world had in its relationships was "friendship" and what Christians have is "fellowship". The more negatively I would look at the world the more correct I thought I was. Yet even in this state of mind, I would have been forced to admit that some of my former friendships in the world were more valuable than most of the fellowship I was seeing in the church. Back then at least we shared our possessions, talked about our pains and hid nothing.

Part of this religious fellowship notion derives from the desire to be great and big. Where most people would admit that you can really only have so many close friends (Jesus maxed at 12), they take fellowship to be much more inclusive and potentially broad. In this mega church era, it's easy to be deceived that fellowship is something people can sign up for or join into - that people can be in your fellowship though your hearts and thoughts are so distant. This desire to grow bigger in number has diluted the quality of that growth by devaluing the essence of true fellowship which is friendship. Have we forgotten that where two or three are gathered in Christ's honor, he has promised to be there in the midst. What more do we want? Have forgotten that although Jesus touched the whole world, he could only walk with twelve?

The friendships that we were involved in prior meeting and surrendering to Christ are not really a good measure for this fellowship I'm trying to define, but they may be closer than what religion is portraying. Most of those friendships ended harshly, scarcely offering loyalty or encouragement toward purity. Some of the wounds from those friendships are the cause for these glass walls we've put between ourselves and those around us. But true fellowship is friendship based on trust. It's being able to be vulnerable and on the same level. The friendship God offers us to take part in with him and his brave people is our childhood best friend times ten : someone we can pray with, weep with, teach and be taught by, work with, call at any time, and hike mountains with. It's not this masquerade of fake love that's defined as fellowship because it's clothed in religious guise. Real fellowship is based on the unity of the spirit. Although you may only be able to enjoy this friendship with two or twelve in everyday life, you can sense it in just a few sentences from fellows across the world. It's a deep heart love that spans the globe but works from within, reaching those who are closest.

Another presumption about fellowship is that it is solely dependent on the subject matter we speak of in each other's presence. Real friendship which is fellowship doesn't have the pressure of speaking about the bible or even "spiritual subjects". Imagine the long nights around fires Jesus spent with his disciples. What Peter, James, John and Jesus experienced was the core of friendship. Think of the friendship of David and Jonathan when their hearts were knit together. The abundance of their hearts no doubt expressed the things of the spirit, but it was a

natural flowing discourse in the midst of their deep friendship.

Fellowship with God is the basis of real fellowship with man. God even defines his relationship to us as that of a friend when we choose to follow him. Abraham was known as a friend of God. Proverbs 18 says, “there is a friend that sticks closer than a brother.” Jesus in John 15:13-15 clearly says that he considers his disciples friends. I love that word “friend”. It’s so de-glossed and understandable. A good friend who knows the counsel of God is a prize. Even Jesus, who is Lord and called “Master” wants to be known as friend. Seeing fellowship as friendship tears down the walls of religious facade and the distortion of leadership experienced in clergy-laity relationships.

Friendship is brotherhood, fellowship and the natural essential part of a church body. It is another dynamic, like that of marriage and fatherhood, where we have opportunity to give and receive great love.

“There is no greater love shown, that when someone lays down their life for a friend” Jesus