**Fellowship**

Welcome back to Centred. We are continuing our series – Slowing Down to Savour the Savour, where we consider what it takes to more singularly follow Jesus in spite of the pervasive hurry that tends to threaten our faith. Our approach is looking at the practices of Jesus – the spiritual disciplines. Last week, Luke Crawford came and spoke – he gave a fantastic message on Jacob and surrender. We’re going to keep splashing in the odd gospel sermon every so often, that’s to remind you to preach the gospel to recall the principles of Jesus since we are focussing on the practices.

Okay, so if you were here a couple of weeks ago you may remember us pointing to how the spiritual disciplines are commonly divided into two categories:

These categories are abstinence and engagement. Jesus modelled abstaining – to forgo doing something, and he also modelled engaging – to participate, to immerse yourself with God somehow.

That’s not to say that you can’t both abstain and engage at the same time; I just think it’s helpful to know the focus of each practice.

At this point we’ve looked at one discipline of abstinence: solitude, and one discipline of engagement: meditation. Tonight, we’re going to consider another form of engagement, and that is fellowship.

In that case I want to direct your attention to the food that will be coming out in the atrium, you can enjoy some fellowship and that will wrap up our night (anticipate laughs), not quite yet.

In all seriousness though, if you grew up at church – you’re probably familiar with how this term ‘fellowship’ would often get used in terms of eating.

Before we get to our discussion questions, I want to give you a brief overview of what fellowship is, why we fellowship, and how we fellowship.

Let me begin by asking you to consider a close group of friends or group of family members in your life. You’ve got it...Okay, now how does the dynamic of this group change when one or a couple of these people are missing? It’s not quite the same is It. I mean you still have fun, but the absent person’ contributions are missed not just with their presence, but also in how they engage and bring our attributes of you and the other people in the group. They play a key role.

When it comes to your relationship with God, this is true too. Spending time with brothers and sisters in Christ will prompt you to see God differently, you’ll see Him in a way than you just wouldn’t on your own – you’ll worship Him more fully.

Dallas Willard puts it this way: **“Personalities united can contain more of God and sustain the force of his greater presence much better than scattered individuals.”**

In the 21st century, within fighting busyness and hurry, we fight privacy. You’ve got so much to do and only you truly know what this entails – so you keep it to yourself. I’m not bashing being productive, but this individualistic mindset can lead to an attitude of narcissism – you do what appeals to you. You miss out on the benefits of being with other believers, but more than that you miss out on your primary purpose in the Christian community: to serve.

The Apostle Paul says in Ephesians 4:11-12, “So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, **to equip** his people for works of **service** so that the body of Christ may be built up.”

In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul describes the diversity of how this plays out. He says in verse 7, “Now to each one the manifestation of the spirit is given for the common good.” He then goes on to share how the Holy Spirit has gifted each believer differently (you can mark a note down that the eventual new Young adults pastor, he’ll answer your questions on spiritual gifts). What I want you to see from this is that fellowship is ultimately an expression of the church. The church is often referred to as the body of Christ – us as believers. Just as a body has many parts, its many parts form one body, and that’s the case for us as Christians (1 Cor 12:12) – we can’t em**body** this on our own.

The early church is probably the best example of this. Do you remember what was said of the as their 4 foundations? The 4 things that they practiced regularly. This is found in Acts 2:42 – they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching, to fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer.

They ‘devoted’, they clung to, they were intentional to, they made a consistent habit of. They devoted themselves to fellowship.

‘Fellowship’ in the Greek is *Koinonia*. This means to share, to partake, to link together in common cause.

Luke, the writer of Acts goes on flush that out in the next verses. He says starting in verse 44, “All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need (wow). 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 favour of all people. And the Lord added to their number daily to those who were being saved.”

This is amazing they were together every single day – their sacrificial living with one another bared witness to those around them. The Lord added to their number daily, those who were being saved. You know, right before the writer Luke describes the habits of these people, he describes one of the greatest days in church history: Pentecost. And if you scroll up in your Bible, he mentions that about 3000 were added to their number that day (Acts 2:41).

I think what’s interesting is this great outpouring of God’s spirit, it didn’t just come down upon one individual believer, it didn’t even come down upon a group of white Baptists, but it came down upon Parthians, Medea, Elamites, residents of Mesopotamia, Judea, and Cappadocia, Pontus, and Asia, Phrygia, and Pamphylia, Egypt, Libya, Romans, Cretans, Arabs (Acts 2:9-11). Oh, what a sight that must have been!

God works in the communal – Adam had a relational void, God made Eve, we too are made relationally, we’re made in God’s image. This is why we are to fellowship. God had fellowship with Jesus and the Holy Spirit. We’re to have fellowship with one other just like that.

Do you know what Jesus’ prayer was less than a week before going to the cross? He said in John 17:20, “I pray…for those who believe in me through their message that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you.”

Jesus wants us to be united in the same way that Him and His father are united. Now let’s just back this up a little bit for a second. Fellowship means to share, and to link together in common cause. What’s the common cause here? Before we can have fellowship with one another we must not just be followers of Jesus, but we must first have fellowship with God.

At the beginning of Jesus’ prayer in John 17 in verse 3 he says mid-prayer, “Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.” Eternal life is simply that we know God.

In a later book that John writes, he says in 1 John 1:2-3: “…and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. 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.

You see what John is saying? He’s like ‘I was there, I heard Jesus pray about unity and fellowship with believers, I’m the one who recorded it’. Notice what he says, “And we proclaim to you the eternal life.” How does that look? “And our fellowship is with the Father and with Son, Jesus Christ.”

Eternal life is that we know God. The late British preacher John Stott sums it up like this, he says, **“the purpose of the proclamation of the gospel is, therefore, not salvation but fellowship.”**

In other words, the gospel is not an end in itself, the purpose is to get you to fellowship with God. I often begin my prayers by thanking God, thanking Him that He sent Jesus to the cross for me so that I could have communion with God, so that I can be relationship with Him. Jesus makes this possible.

John and the other apostles are so adamant that we experience this too. “We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you may also have fellowship with us.”

John is saying in order for you to have fellowship with us – in order for you to live out your part as the body of Christ, you must first have fellowship with God. There is an order, one doesn’t just lead to the other, one makes possible for the latter.

Dr. Martyn Lloyd Jones says, **“Christians are people who know what they have. The Christian experience, in other words, is a definite and certain experience.”**

Do you know that to be true in your life today? Are you living in fellowship with God today? It’s my prayer that you are.

Okay, last, we’re going to consider how to fellowship – that is how to fellowship with others.

I find it helpful to think about this from three different levels of fellowship – so with other Christians.

There is the surface level, the personal level, and the spiritual level.

These are probably pretty self-explanatory. The surface level is borderline ice breaker conversation, you talk about the weather, sports (did you catch the Super Bowl, have you qualified for the Leafs tickets on LIFE? Sorry you had your chance) you know other interests too, but things that ultimately aren’t directly about you.

The personal level requires you to be more intentional (and are about you, they are personal), you might talk about your health or your career, your family, or your schooling.

And then, there is the spiritual level of fellowship, this includes Christ, it often involves prayer, you’re talking about how God is working in your life, where He’s leading you. This is ultimately where fellowship begins.

When you’re in fellowship, you’re sharing life together.

Your interest becomes my interest. You’ve got this job opportunity – don’t know whether to take it - I’m going to pray for you, I’m going to lift you up to God, and point out anything that He’s showing me.

Your problem becomes my problem. That sin that’s robbing you, I’m going to love on you. I’m going to share my shortcomings and how Jesus has freed me, and I’m going to hold you accountable, I’m going to follow up and check in on you. And you’ll do the same for me.

In fellowship, we carry each other’s burdens (Gal. 6:2), we spur one another on, we do not forsake meeting together as some are in the habit of doing (we make it a discipline), and ultimately, we encourage one another (Heb. 10:24-25).

I’m so encouraged when I come here, I’m so encouraged when I chat with close Christian brothers. But, let me just say that there is so much discouragement in the world – just turn on the news.

And yet we live in a day when Christians in North America consider going to church once a month to be regular church attendance (one in four weeks). Friends, it’s no wonder we’re discouraged when we’re giving up meeting together. This isn’t the only way to fellowship, but it is the primary way. I would just love when we transition to pray later tonight that you might renew your allegiance for the local church – that’s the priority, and that Centred would consider be something you commit to or re-commit too as well.

In preserving fellowship, we don’t just embody Christ, we preserve His testimony. And I just want to remind you that whatever the difficulties are for you with Christian community going into this weekend that Jesus will build his church and the gates of hell will not prevail (Matt. 16:18).

The Devil loves to separate us. He knows that two are better than one, he knows we’re more vulnerable when we’re isolated. Pray tonight too for close Christian friends to fellowship with so that you don’t slide into isolation, praise God for those that you do have.

As we transition into discussion now, I just want to leave you with one thought that I hope just gives us a greater posture of gratitude for each other for the rest of the night.

I’m sure some of you have heard of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. He was a German pastor during World War II and was in strong opposition to Nazi Germany. He led seminaries and underground churches, but in 1943 was finally imprisoned. It was at this point that Bonhoeffer said he was stripped of the greatest gift God had given him.

In fact, in his book *Life Together* he wrote, **“the physical gift of other Christians is incomparable strength to the unbeliever…Let him [her] who has such a privilege thank God on his [her] knees and declare, it is grace, nothing but grace that we are allowed to live in fellowship with other believers.”**

Bonhoeffer, if you know his story, would be executed two years later in the last year of the war. Transition to questions.