

Live the New Life (5): Fellowship

Matthew 18:20 (New American Standard Bible)

²⁰ For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst.”

Acts 2:42 (New American Standard Bible)

*They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to **fellowship**, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.*

Hebrews 10:24-25 (New American Standard Bible)

²⁴ and let’s consider how to encourage one another in love and good deeds, ²⁵ not abandoning our own meeting together, as is the habit of some people, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.

Introduction

In 1996, I was in Michigan serving a congregation. Although everything was well in the church, it was a tough year for me and my family. It all began with my wife losing weight. At first, it was great news (who doesn’t want to lose a pound or two, right?). However, as she continued losing weight and became very thin, my wife and I began to be concerned about it. Furthermore, because she couldn’t handle stress well (part of the symptoms), she began to isolate herself from people including her own family. Later on, her illness was diagnosed as overactive thyroid. It was finally regulated through radiation treatment. For about six months, while this was still going on, I did as much as I could as husband and as father. One night, though, I had enough. I had to let it out, my pent-up emotions, so I opened the back porch window and screamed out into the cornfield.

While this was going on, I had to work. My pastoral duties didn’t stop. One of them was preaching. I had to preach on Sundays. One Sunday, during the Passing of the peace, a teenager named Chris, came up to me and said, “What’s up, Pastor Choi?” I don’t think he knew what was going on in my life at that time. However, his simple four words of greeting brought tears to my eyes. I felt like, “Finally, here’s someone who cares about me!” That day, I experienced the power of greetings. At the same time, I realized the power of gathering which we call fellowship. Without the church that day and without him being there with me, I would have never experienced the power of words that brought me

comfort and encouragement. That's what I am going to talk about this morning: fellowship of the believers in Christ and the power of being together in Christ.

Content

The English author John Donne once said, "No man is an island." The Chinese also knew about the necessity of connectedness. The Chinese character for "people" also indicates that we need each other in life. We depend on each other. We are interdependent. We are designed to need each other's company. For example, after the LORD God created Adam, He said, "It is **not good** for the man to be alone" (the Hebrew meaning of 'not good' here is 'evil' or 'wicked') [Genesis 2:18]. We need each other's company. We are created to be together at home, at work, at church, and in our society. That leads us to Matthew 18:20. Let's read together in one voice.

Matthew 18:20 (New American Standard Bible)

²⁰ *For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst."*

Let me unpack this verse for you.

For where two or three have gathered together: How many people are needed to have church? Two. That's the quorum. Two or three who have the common faith in Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord make up the church gathering.

in My name: The key here is His name. At church, we always gather in Jesus' name, not in the name of the pastor, not in the name of council, not in the name of township, but in the name of Jesus, because there's power in gathering in Jesus' name. Where does the power come from? From His presence, from His glory, and from Jesus Himself. His name makes the difference.

I am there in their midst: One of the things Jesus does for us when we gather in His name is this: He too Himself **IS** present in our midst. He is present whenever and wherever we gather in His name. Since He is there with us, Jesus also provides His protection in our gathering so that the devil can't touch us. For example, it was so much fun growing up in Korea in the 1960s. Every family was having babies after the Korean War was over, like America after World War II. My parents had six kids. My whole neighborhood was swarming with boys and girls. The boys organized their own army to compete with the neighboring boys. Two neighborhood boys had snowball fights, shot homemade arrows, and fought with wooden swords. Those were fun times!

In that army, my older brother was second-in-command. Oh, how proud I was of him, and whenever my brother was with me, let me tell you, no boy dared to bully me. I didn't have to worry about bullies because of his protection. Our church gathering is no different.

When we gather, Jesus is with us. Because He is with us, the devil wouldn't dare to harass us. Sadly, however, we often fail to realize this truth in our worship, Bible studies, and committee meetings.

Think one more time how precious the divine presence is to us. Remember King David? He wrote Psalm 23 in which he said, *"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me"* (Psalm 23:4). His presence dispels our fears. David also said, *"I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever"* (Psalm 23:6). Another Psalmist confessed that one day in God's house and in His presence was far better than a thousand days anywhere else (Psalm 84:10). Oh, I pray that all of us would confess the same! The same David said, *"One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life"* (Psalm 27:4).

Think about it. Who was David? He was a king. He lived in a palace with gourmet food and all the glory in the world. He had everything, yet what he truly desired was to be in God's tent before the presence of the Lord. Oh, I wish we all had such a longing and desire to be in God's house with God's people in His presence!

So, what do we do when we come together in Jesus' name? We do everything in His name; we worship together in His name. We praise God's name among us. We pray together in Jesus' name. We encourage each other in Jesus' name. This leads us to the next verse. Let's read it together in one voice.

Hebrews 10:24-25 (New American Standard Bible)

²⁴and let's consider how to encourage one another in love and good deeds, ²⁵not abandoning our own meeting together, as is the habit of some people, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near. Let me unpack the verse again.

Let us consider how to encourage (stimulate, spur, challenge, and rouse) **one another in love and good deeds:** This command is for everyone, every believer. It's not just the minister's job. Rather, it's everyone's job (old and young, male and female, members and friends) to encourage each other in love and good deeds.

We need to keep praying for God's wisdom and fresh ideas to encourage one another. We as a church need to come up with creative ways to encourage each other to love and do good. We indeed edify each other by our examples and testimonies to the point where everyone wants to join the church and grow in Christ. For example, in my former congregation, there was a lady whose name was Stella. She always wanted to be like Thelma, another member of the church; and Thelma wanted to be like Tom another member in character, and so on. Don't underestimate your godly example before other believers. We encourage each other.

Not abandoning our own meeting together: Interesting, isn't it? Two thousand years ago, the writer of 'Hebrews' warned the believers against neglecting Christian worship. In fact, did you know that it is the devil's strategy to keep us from gathering together so as to drive us into further isolation, loneliness, and depression? By the way, loneliness is one of the biggest problems in our society today. That's another topic for later sermon.

Here's a reality. Over the past 60 years, the American church has neglected the practice of meeting together in Jesus' name. For example, until the mid-1960s, a typical mainline denominational church would have Wednesday night and Sunday night services. Sixty years later, we have dropped these practices. Nowadays, we are lucky if we offer Sunday morning services. Even with that, the average attendance for Methodists is now once a month. At this rate, another 50 years from now, we may not have in-person Sunday morning services at all; maybe only virtual worship over the internet (which, by the way, is already happening). Don't get me wrong. While live-streaming worship has its merits and serves well those with physical limitations, it will never replace the in-person worship services. Folks, let us diligently gather in Christ's name; physically, in God's house.

encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near: The key word is to 'encourage.' The more we gather and stay together, the stronger our faith will be. And vice versa. Let me tell you what the church of God is like. It is like a fireplace. Consider how a fireplace works. Each log must stay together for the fire going strong for some time. If they are pulled apart, even the log with a strong flame won't last long. Each member is like that piece of wood. The flame is like our faith. Our faith gets strong and lasts long when we are together. And vice versa.

Conclusion

Action Point

So, let's get practical. How can we be intentional about fellowship?

First, *make church gathering a priority*. Block out time for church services on Sunday, small groups, Bible studies, prayer meetings, or even just coffee with a friend who shares your faith.

Second, *reach out*. Don't wait for others to connect with you—be the one to call, send a message, invite someone over, or check in on a friend.

And third, *be present*. When you're with others, truly be there. Listen, share, and encourage. You never know how your presence could be God's answer to someone's prayer.

Let us pray together in one voice: Help us, Lord, not to neglect to get together in Your name. Amen.