

## Back to the Basics of Fellowship

“For some reason, one day, I don’t know, maybe it was last week’s joke, but Mary Jane husband Russ, suddenly died. But fortunately though, he had left her \$20,000 to cover the expenses for the funeral and stuff, and after everything was done, she told her closest friend that there was no money left.

And so her friend says, ‘Well, how can that be? You just told me that Russ left you \$20,000 a few days back before he died to take care of things. How could you be broke already?’

And Mary Jane replied, ‘Well you see, the funeral home cost \$6,000. And of course, I made the obligatory donation to the church, and so that was another \$2,000 and so the rest went for the memorial stone.’

And Mary Jane’s friend said, ‘Wow! \$12,000 for the memorial stone? My goodness, how big is it?’

And Mary Jane extended her left hand and said, ‘Oh, about three carats.’”

Now folks, how many of you would say Russ is obviously still paying a price for last weeks joke? I mean, praise God, I got five bucks out of it but apparently Mary Jane ended up with three carats? What a deal! But seriously Mary Jane! Come on! That’s not the kind of stone you’re supposed to get for your spouse’s funeral! Gee whiz! How many of you would say there’s some **serious friction** going on in their relationship there?

And folks, believe it or not, I see this same kind of **ongoing friction** happening to Christians all the time. Only it’s not in their earthly marriage, it’s in their spiritual marriage with Jesus Christ! And it’s not when they find

out their spouse blew all the money for their funeral on a diamond ring. Get this. It's when they consider hanging out with God **as if it were a bad thing!** Can you believe that?

**And so that's the obvious question,** "How in the world did it ever get that way? How did it ever become a detriment to spend time with God, the Creator of the Universe? It didn't start off that way, right? I mean, when we first got saved, we couldn't wait to spend time with God, we longed for God, we really loved God, right? And so that's the question is, "How did it ever get like that?" Well folks, as we've been seeing, what I've learned over the years is it's simply this...when we **lose sight** of what we have in Jesus Christ, what He died on the cross for...the joy set before Him...**A beautiful loving intimate personal relationship with the Creator of the Universe. That's what He died on the cross for!**

And folks, I'm telling you, when we lose sight of that, all of a sudden, just like that, overnight, your once loving vibrant walk with Jesus Christ, just turned into dry, stale, stupid, boring, man-made religion called Churchianity. Not Christianity...Churchianity! And as we've been seeing folks, this is a deadly horrible wretched disease! It's rotten! It's totally rotten! And once you get infected with that thing, you start crying out one of two things..."Help! I'm a Christian and I can't grow up!" or "Help! I'm a

Christian and I'm dead as a stump!" You ever been there? Yeah, **unfortunately** it happens all the time!

Therefore, to stave off this deadly horrible disease called Churchianity, we're going to continue in our study called, **Back to the Basics**. And what we're doing is **revisiting** all the **Basics of Christianity** but this time, we're doing it **through the eyes of a relationship**, a loving relationship, a personal relationship with the Creator of the Universe! And so hopefully this time we can recapture the **right motive** for doing what we do as Christians **and this time...stay there!** Amen?

And so far we've already seen that the **first basic thing** we need to get reacquainted with through the eyes of a relationship was **The Basics of Prayer**. The **second basic thing** we need to get reacquainted with through the eyes of a relationship was **The Basics of Worship**. The **third basic thing** we need to get reacquainted with through the eyes of a relationship was **The Basics of Serving**. And last time we saw the **fourth basic thing** we need to get reacquainted with through the eyes of a relationship was **The Basics of Bible Study**. And what we saw there was that Bible study, i.e. reading God's 66 love letters that He left behind for us as His children, to get to know Him better before we get to meet Him in heaven, wasn't something mystical or magical or something that only the super duper

intelligent or brainiac bookworms know how to do. No! Anybody can do it! You just exert yourself, make haste and give diligence, just like you're **already doing** with other things, **only this time**, it's applied to the Bible! Anybody can do it! And then we saw **when you do do it**, you don't do it with an attitude of Carelessness, or Aimlessness, or even Impressiveness! No! We wouldn't do that in a normal loving relationship, so why would we do that in our relationship with God? We just read the Bible to get to know Jesus better, before we meet Him face to face in heaven, to deepen our relationship, amen? That's all it is. And we saw once we realize this, we're finally on our way to getting rid of this goofball Churchianity stuff, amen?

But that's not all. The **fifth basic thing** of Christianity that we need to get reacquainted with through the eyes of a relationship is **The Basics of Fellowship**. But don't take my word for it. Let's listen to God's.

**Hebrews 10:19-25** "Therefore, brothers, 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 in full assurance of faith, 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. 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."

Now folks, according to our text, we got some good news going on here, **if** we're going to **persevere** in the Christian life, what'd it say there? **One**, we keep drawing near to God in full assurance of faith in **prayer** realizing that we've been cleansed from a guilty conscience through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross. He's our High Priest now! Forever making intercession for us, isn't that awesome! **Two**, we hold unswervingly to the hope we have in God that He will do what He says He's going to do. And this hope is built up more and more as we **study the Bible**, right? That's where it's recorded for us! **Three**, we keep spurring each other on as Christians to do even more love and good deeds for the Lord, which would involve **servicing** to do that, right? And **four**, we keep on what? We keep on meeting together, i.e. **fellowship**, right? Why? Because that's the context that all this takes place in! You don't get encouragement alone! You get it from other people! And so that's why the Bible says if we Christians are going to make it through these horrible last days and persevere, then we've got to be meeting together and hanging out together more and more as much as we possibly can...**why**? So we can encourage each other as much as we possibly can, so we can take our stand in these horrible last days, right?

**And so here's the point.** Surely that's what we're doing, right? I mean, surely we're taking advantage of God-given **fellowship** to encourage

ourselves in order to persevere in these last days and stand strong, right? Eeeench! Wrong answer! Folks, let's be honest. For most of us, when it comes to fellowship, we're just a little bit standoffish. In fact, if we're honest, we treat the opportunity to hang out with other Christians as if we we're being asked to hang out with circus freaks, right? But seriously folks, when it comes to **fellowship**, isn't that our attitude? We either flat out **don't want to do it**, or we don't **look forward to it**, or when we **do do it**, we don't want to get too close to those other icky people, break out the hand sanitizer, right? But people, that's not what we just read! We're supposed to hang out with each other as much as we possible can, so we can receive the greatest amount of encouragement as we can, right? Why would we want to miss out on that? **Especially** in these last days!

Therefore, let's get **Back to Basics!** Let's revisit this topic of fellowship **but this time** through the eyes of a beautiful loving intimate personal relationship with the Creator of the Universe! And let's dispel this goofball Churchianity stuff once and for all!

And the **first basic question** we need to ask ourselves if we're going to dispel this goofball Churchianity stuff is, "**Why Do We Fellowship?**" Well, let's take a look. Encouragement is just the beginning of why we do it.

**John 13:33-35** "My children, I will be with you only a little longer. You will look for me, and just as I told the Jews, so I tell you now: Where I am

going, you cannot come. A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you love one another.”

Now folks, can I simply translate what I believe is the appropriate response to the question we posed, “**Why do we fellowship?**” Let me see if I can be as blunt as I can...according to the words of Jesus...**BECAUSE IT’S A POWERFUL WITNESS TO THE LOST!** Hello! Folks, **are we crazy?** What’d Jesus say there? He said when we gather together for fellowship as Christians, and we get busy loving each other, not hating each other, with the same kind of love that He’s already given to us, what does that do? He said it’s not just for our own benefit, it’s for what? It’s for the benefit of the lost! **Why?** Because it’s common sense people! If this world that has never seen Jesus is ever going to believe in Jesus, then the followers of Jesus must love like Jesus, right? That’s common sense! And so in essence that means, **we’re a commercial for Jesus!** We’re a walking advertisement for Him and the Gospel. And notice it wasn’t in the context of a **single person!** It was plural. When **you Christians, disciples, love each other**, in the context of fellowship, it shows other people, non-Christians, the lost, the world, that Jesus is real and they really can have a beautiful loving intimate personal relationship with the Creator of the Universe through Him, just like we have!

**And so that's the question**, when we're meeting together as Christians, **for fellowship**, what kind of commercial are we being to the lost? A horror flick? A sinful show? A potty mouth sitcom? A battle scene? Or are we being what we're supposed to be, a beautiful awesome true-life storybook romance? And people, this is what I think we so often miss about the power of our fellowship. It's not just for us. The way that we interact with each other, can be a profound witness to the lost. And whether we realize it or not, God'll use our godly, loving interaction, to show the lost that He's the way out of the pit they're in, like this man found out.

“A **man** fell into a pit and couldn't get himself out.

So a **subjective person** came along and said, ‘I feel for you down there.’

Then an **objective person** walked by and said, ‘It's logical that someone would fall down there.’

A **Pharisee** said, ‘Only bad people fall into pits.’

A **mathematician** calculated the precise angle in which he fell into the pit.

A **news reporter** wanted the exclusive story on the pit.

An **IRS agent** asked if he was paying taxes on the pit.

A **self-pitying person** said, ‘You haven't seen anything until you've seen my pit!’

A **psychologist** noted, ‘Your mother and father are to blame for your being in that pit.’



A **self-esteem therapist** said, 'Believe in yourself and you can get out of that pit.'

An **optimist** said, 'Things could get worse.'

A **pessimist** claimed, ‘Things **WILL** get worse.’

And **Jesus**, seeing the man, took him by the hand and loved him by lifting him out of the pit.”

People of God, whether you realize it or not, or care or not, our world is so sick and tired of being lied to. They’re so sick and tired of all the false religions on the planet that cannot deliver them from their pit of despair. They’re so sick of the same ol’, same ol’. But praise God, that’s where we come in. When we get busy loving each other, with the same love that God’s already given to us, in godly fellowship, it literally becomes the Hand of God, extended to them, showing the good news that God is real, and through Jesus Christ they can **finally** be pulled out of the pit. You see folks, witnessing doesn’t take place not **just** when the Preacher preaches. It doesn’t take place **just** when we give out a Gospel tract or even a video. No! According to the Bible, it takes place when God’s people get busy loving each other in true honest fellowship. And can I tell you something? That’s **exactly** what the world is waiting to see. **That’s why we fellowship!** It’s not just about us. It’s about the lost! And when we realize this, we’re finally on our way to getting rid of this goofball Churchianity stuff, amen?

But that’s not all. The **second basic question** we need to ask ourselves if we’re going to dispel this goofball Churchianity stuff is, “**What**

**is Fellowship?**” Well again folks, it’s not that hard to understand, **if** you’re not suffering from Churchianity. If you look at it through the eyes of a relationship, it makes total perfect sense! And that’s exactly what the word means! The word **fellowship** comes from the Greek word “koinonia” and it literally means “a joint participation or intimate community.” Or in other words, **a family!** An intimate family. That’s all it is folks! When we get together for fellowship, it’s a family meeting! That’s all it is! That’s all we’re doing. We’re hanging out intimately with the family of God. Or to put it in even simpler terms, the Crone translation, in the context of a relationship... **Fellowship is simply celebrating our relationship with God with other people who are also celebrating their relationship with God.**

And folks, celebration is the key word there! Each time we get together it should be one big giant family party! Turn to somebody and say... “It’s party time!” Don’t believe me? The early church knew how to party! Check it out!

**Acts 2:38-47** “Peter replied, Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off – for all whom the Lord our God will call. With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, Save yourselves from this corrupt generation. Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.

They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers

were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he 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.”

Whoa! Now folks, is that an awesome party or what? I mean, you talk about a **rager**! What'd it say there? When some 3,000 people of the early Church got saved, they didn't just go back home and do their own thing and go watch some TV or hang out by themselves, what'd they do? They got busy partying! A different kind of party! God's party! The kind of parties we need to be a part of! Hello! They **immediately** got busy partying with the Apostle's teaching, i.e. **Bible study**, they immediately got busy partying by **servng** each other taking care of their needs, even selling their own possessions just to buy grub! They were serious about their party snacks! And man! You talk about jamming music! They immediately pumped it up and got busy **praising** God **singing songs** and **praying** to Him, and how long did all this last? Listen! You talk about a rager! It wasn't just a party once a week, what'd it say there? They partied every single day. They were **totally devoted** to it? They were party animals, right?

**And people, that's precisely the point!** That should be our attitude every single time we get an opportunity to fellowship with other Christians.

We should be jumping up and down screaming, “Whoo Hoo! It’s party time! **Why?** Because apparently, we have forgotten what the early Church knew so well. That when God’s people get together and party, God’s kind of party, amazing things start to take place! What’d it say there? Miracles began to happen, signs and wonders were everywhere, lives were changed for all eternity, and people got saved by the truckloads, every single day! Now that’s a party I want to be a part of, amen?

And yet, herein lies our problem. For some reason, we think **fellowship** is some mysterious religious thing that only those who “have taken that Jesus thing a little bit too far”...you know those wackos...know how to do. Or it’s only for those who have “have way too much time on their hands,” but thank you very much, I have a life, right? But people, that’s not what we just read! That passage didn’t say that only those believers in the early Church who had “way too much time on their hands” or “who were totally wacko” were able to **fellowship**. No! The Bible simply states that every true Born again Christian has the privilege of celebrating their new life in Christ with other Christians, i.e. partying with the rest of God’s family, **as much as they’d like!** I mean, think about it people! Isn’t that awesome! We’ve got permission to party from God! Only it’s a godly party.

And again, just like with prayer, worship, serving and Bible study, fellowship, God's party, is something we can all do. God picked something we can all do! It's not that complicated! For instance, how many of you can get together with some friends to celebrate a birthday? Well guess what? You know how to **fellowship**...you know how to party with other believers whether you realize it or not. Turn to somebody and say, "**You party animal**, you!" Or how many of you have ever looked forward to going to some sporting event or some concert with others friends and getting all wild and crazy with excitement? Well guess what? You know how to party...you know how to **fellowship** with other believers whether you realize it or not. Turn to somebody and say, "**You wacko crazed fan**, you!" Or how many of you have ever got excited about to going to a family reunion and spending hours catching up on old times with the rest of your extended family? Well guess what? You have the ability to party or **fellowship** with other believers for hours and hours, a total rager, whether not you realize it or not.

Folks, that's all **Fellowship** is. Nothing more. Nothing less. It's party time! It's one huge big party! We're simply celebrating what God has done for us with other believers who are also celebrating with what God has for us! Hello! It's not that complicated. It's something we can **all do** and in fact we're **already doing**...in other areas...and **that's precisely the problem**,

isn't it? We actually prefer to party with the wrong crowd, the world, and yet we wonder why our lives are filled with so many spiritual hangovers. Hey folks, you party with the pigs. You start to smell, and act, and eat like a pig! Just ask the prodigal son. He turned away from the Father's house.

**And that's precisely the point.** Surely, were not like the prodigal son. I mean surely, come on, if ever there's one party we're looking forward to going to it's partying with the family of God, right? We don't want to turn into a bunch of pigs, right? We don't want to have a spiritual hangover! We don't want to be eating pig slop when we can go to a party that's good for you and makes a positive difference in your life for all eternity, right? Eeeench! Wrong answer! Folks, let's be honest. When it comes to fellowship, it's not something we **look forward** to...it's something we make excuse to **not have to do!** And people, I'm telling you, once we get here, it produces two more horrible side-effects of Churchianity.

And the **first side-effect** is **We Think the Church Has to Be Just Like Me.** A bunch of clones! Excuse me? First of all, that's not only the height of pride, but it's ludicrous to the purpose of the Church! The very nature of the Church is it's supposed to be made up of all different kinds of people, not just one! We just read 3,000 people got saved in one day, not just one! Therefore, you're going to have some 3,000 differences in the Church!

Hello! And besides, the very word “Church” itself means “a group of called out ones” not “a group of called out one!” Not a clone! Hello! We meet together for Church services, not Clone services! Get real!

**And so here’s the problem.** The more you push this self-centered selfishness, clonish attitude if you will, that everybody’s got to be just like me or I’m not going to fellowship with you, pretty soon you start to develop a cynical attitude towards the Church. And yes, granted sometimes it’s kind of freaky when you have to hold some other Christian’s hand in prayer when you go to Church services. You wonder if that’s a milk dud there in their hand as you hold it or just some big giant ol’ mole! And yes, granted, when people stand up and say the reason why they love going to their Church services is because no one judges them there and they can be who they want to be, you want to stand up and shout, “You’re at a bar!” But seriously folks, **that’s precisely the point!** That’s what the Church is **supposed to be!** A bunch of different people from all walks of life, who are all act differently yet are treating each other like one big happy family, milk duds and all!

That’s what makes the Church so beautiful! That what Paul says.

**1 Corinthians 12:12,15-18,25-26** “The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. 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. 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.



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 them to be. So that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.”

In other words, the Church is to be one big family party, that’s made up of **totally different** people, who **totally recognize** that every single one of them is **totally valuable**, and so they **totally care** for each other, right? They have to. They’re a body. A body has to work together! And folks, that’s precisely what you don’t get in the world and that’s the beauty of the Church. This is how it’s supposed to be. This is the power of true godly fellowship and why it’s such a profound witness to the lost! You cannot get this kind of interaction anywhere else on earth but in the Church. I mean, think about it! A multitude of **different people** from **different walks of life** with totally **different backgrounds** who were involved in a whole bunch of **different kinds of sins** before they got saved...now dwelling together in unity! And on top of that, they **love each other** in spite of all their differences. Milk duds and all! What a witness, right? I’ll take that any day of the week over a bar!

And so here’s the point. You don’t get that kind of witness from clones! You don’t get that kind of amazing and impact on the world if

everybody in the Church is made up of people just like you! Are you kidding me? That's stupid! That's arrogant! And it's counter-productive to the purpose of the Church. Turn to somebody and say, "**Hey, praise God for the milk dud in your hand!**" Let's hold hands and pray! And folks, I'm telling you, once we realize this, we're finally on our way to getting rid of this goofball Churchianity stuff, amen?

Oh but that's not all. The **second horrible side-effect** is **We Think the Church Has No Value for Me**. Oh people, here we go to the other end of the spectrum. You see, it's bad enough that we miss the true **purpose** and **nature** of the Church and how our godly fellowship is a profound witness to the lost, but then we make matters even worse by going to the other end of the spectrum and think that Church fellowship has **no value** for me! And hello! We've got to get some encouragement somehow somewhere from somebody, so what do we do? As mentioned earlier, we actually turn away from the Church and start partying with the world! Can you believe that? And so the next thing you know, little by little, the devil starts to choke the life right out of you, like this story shows.

"One day the devil called a worldwide convention of his evil demons and said this. 'We can't keep the Christians from going to heaven, but we can keep them from forming an intimate relationship in Christ. If they gain that connection with Jesus, our power over them is broken. So here's what we do

Let's steal their time, so they can't gain any strength in Jesus Christ. Let's distract them by keeping them busy in the nonessentials of life and invent unnumbered schemes to occupy their minds. We'll over stimulate their minds so that they cannot hear that still small voice.

We'll entice them to play the radio or cassette player whenever they drive, to keep the TV, the VCR, and their CD's going constantly in their homes. And we'll see to it that every store and restaurant in the world plays music constantly jamming their minds to break that union with Christ.

We'll fill their coffee tables with magazines and newspapers and pound their minds with the news twenty-four hours a day. We'll invade their driving moments with billboards and flood their mailboxes with junk mail, sweepstakes, mail order catalogues and every kind of newsletter and promotional offering promising false hopes.

We'll even get them to be excessive in their entertainment or recreation and send them to amusement parks, sporting events, concerts, and movies so they'll return exhausted, disquieted and unprepared for the coming week.

And even when they meet for spiritual fellowship, we'll involve them in gossip and small talk so that they leave with troubled consciences and unsettled emotion. Why, we'll crowd their lives with **so many things** that they have no time or energy to seek power from Christ.

It was quite a convention in the end. And the demons went away eagerly causing Christians everywhere to get busy, busy, busy and rush here and there. Don't forget what 'busy' means. B-eing U-nder S-atan's Y-oke. Has the devil been successful at his scheme? You be the judge."

Now folks, let's be honest, that story is a real eye-opener, isn't it? It's convicting, isn't it? And here's my point. I betcha you just made a resolution to **never going to do that again**, right? Nosiree! I'm not going to party with the world **anymore!** I see the trap for what it is! I've gotten busy, busy, busy with the things of this world and I've been totally sucked dry spiritually! No

way! I see it for what it is! I'm getting back fellowship with God and His people **right now!** Really? Well, let me ask you the obvious question? Why then didn't you do it **last time** you made the same resolution? Why didn't it stop back then whenever it was, the first time you got convicted? Can I tell you why? Because I believe we haven't dealt with the root issue. And that is this. It's not just in realizing the deadly trap of getting caught up in this wicked world system and partying with the world, it's in seeing our desperate need of **fellowship** with God and His church. And that's exactly what Paul was saying!

**1 Corinthians 12:21-22,27** "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. Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it."

People of God if we think there is no value in fellowshiping with the Church then you better listen to the Body analogy here by the Apostle Paul. How far would you get in life if your feet refused to move? Answer? Nowhere! How far would you get if your eyes refused to open? Answer? Not that far, would you? You'd be stumbling around in the dark! What if your liver went on strike because it realized that it worked differently than your ears? What if your hands ceased to function milk duds and all? What if your lungs and heart refused to function together because they were arguing over who was more important, the lungs that pumped air to the body, or the

heart that pumped the blood? Hey, what if your brain went on strike and said there's no value in working with the rest of the body. Answer? You'd be dead, instantly, just like that! **You would die!**

Then people, here's the point. How much more quickly are we going to become spiritually dead if we unplug ourselves from God's life support system called fellowship with the Church and say **it has no value for me?** And then start ingesting wicked poison from this world? No wonder we're acting like a bunch of dead Christian Zombies! No wonder we're walking around like we're dead on arrival! We're partying with dead people!

People of God, I've got good news for you! If you're sick and tired of being a dead Christian Zombie and you're spiritually sucked dry, then go to a different party! It's that simple! Get back to Fellowship! True godly fellowship! Get back to partying with the House of God and the People of God, and come to life again, amen? That's **what Fellowship is!** Nothing more. Nothing less. And once we see that, we're finally on our way of getting rid of this goofball Churchianity stuff, amen?

But that's not all. The **third basic question** we need to ask ourselves if we're going to dispel this goofball Churchianity stuff is "**How Do We Fellowship?**" Well again folks, it's not that hard to understand, **if** you're not

suffering from Churchianity. If you look at it through the eyes of a relationship, it makes total perfect sense. Once again, let's listen to Paul.

**Romans 12:4-8** “Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given us.

If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully.”

Now folks, according to our text, we've got some good news! I mean, you talk about purpose and value in life! This is awesome! No more vanities of vanities! The empty vain way of living! When we get saved, we don't just become a **part** of the Body of Christ, we what? We get gifts from God to be a major **help** to Body of Christ, right? We're needed! What'd it say there? Whatever you're gift is, which means, you're going to get one, at least one, be it teaching, serving, encouraging, giving, whatever it is, do it and when you do it, do it cheerfully, why? Because this is amazing! Each of us plays a wonderful powerful incredible role in the overall health of the Church! We party together and we help each other together! That's to be our mindset. **That's how we fellowship!** Which means, we do not just punch in our time clock and get on with life! No! But we recognize that every single part of the Body of Christ, milk duds and all, are needed for the overall health of the

Church! It a big team! It's God's team! And every player is desperately needed if we're going to win the game! Hello! Turn to somebody and say, "**We need you man! Get in the game!**"

And folks again, if you look at this through the eyes of a relationship, it makes total perfect sense. And that's why the **first way we do not** fellowship together, since it serves a valuable important function, is with **An Attitude of Isolation**. And to help illustrate the foolishness of doing this in our personal relationship with God and His people, let's take a look at it through the eyes of another personal relationship, via the help of **Billy Croncowski** and the **Beefalo Bills**! And what we're going to do here is I, **Billy Croncowski** is going to be confronted by my fellow teammates about my behavior and I'm going to have this attitude of isolation, and you tell me how it goes.

**Player #1:** "Hey guys, look! It's Billy Croncowski the awesome quarterback of the Beefalo Bills! We found him just in the nick of time! Hey Billy, where have you been man? The games about to get started and we're headed to the stadium. Are you ready to go? Come on!"

**Billy:** "Oh, yeah...the game. Well, you see guys, I've decided that I don't need to go to the stadium to play football games anymore."

**Player #2:** "Say what? What are you talking about? You're the quarterback! We need you!"

**Billy:** "Well you see, I've decided that I can be a quarterback right here in nature. I don't have to go to a stadium to prove that I'm a quarterback. No way! I'll just throw the ball around a little bit out here with the squirrels and

chipmunks and together we'll appreciate God's beauty? Isn't that awesome!"

**Player #3:** "Awesome? Are you nuts! Have you been eating chicken again? You can't be a quarterback in nature! What good is that? How can you be a part of the team if you're all alone in nature? Billy we need you! Knock it off! Stop goofing off and get in the game!"

Now folks, was goofy, or what? I mean, what a quarterback, huh? I don't think I have to go to the stadium to be a quarterback but I can just hang out in nature with the squirrels? Nuts is right? I'm missing the point! Quarterbacks are **designed** to play in stadiums! Hello! That's where they function! Nice quarterback, huh?

So folks, **here's the point**. What do we think we're doing when we do that to God and His Church? How many times have you heard people say, "I don't have to go to Church services to be a Christian? I can worship God in nature," right? Well, first of all, that's usually an excuse to sit around and do **nothing!** Because the people who typically say that don't even go out in nature on a regular basis, as opposed to Church services! And secondly, you're missing the whole point! Christians are designed to gather together with the Church. That's what the word means, "A group of called out ones," not a group of "You and a squirrel!" Nutty is right!



But that's not all. The **second way we do not** fellowship is with **An Attitude of Rationalization**. For instance, what if I was confronted by my teammates about my behavior and I had this attitude of rationalization.

**Player #1:** "Hey guys, look! It's Billy Croncowski the awesome quarterback of the Beefalo Bills! We found him just in the nick of time! Hey Billy, where have you been man? The games about to get started and we're headed to the stadium. Are you ready to go? Come on!"

**Billy:** "Oh, yeah...the game. Well, you see guys, I've decided that I'm not going to go the stadium to play football games anymore."

**Player #2:** "Say what? What are you talking about? You're the quarterback! We need you!"

**Billy:** "Well you see, I used to go to the stadium, but I noticed that some of the other players weren't really that good at football, so I realized that they were a bunch of football hypocrites, and I decided to quit. And then, half the time the stadium was either too cold or too hot for me, so I didn't feel comfortable. And then to top it off, every time I went, they kept asking for me for money!"

**Player #1:** "Well, hello Billy! Stadium's cost money, you know? Somebody's got to pay the light bill! That's only natural. You enjoy playing in a stadium, don't you?"

**Player #2:** And as far as being too cold or too hot, hello! You're at a stadium. What do you expect! Bring a blanket or a fan if it bugs you that much!

**Player #3:** And as far as having to play with other players that aren't that good, first of all, have you seen your own stats this year Billy? You're not that good either. No wonder we have a losing season!

**Player #4:** And besides, that's the whole point of being on a team. You're supposed to help the other players to become better players! What's wrong with you Billy? Have you been eating chicken again? Knock it off! Stop goofing off and get in the game!"

Now folks, was that goofy, or what? I mean, I'm saying I'm a quarterback but I'm complaining that the stadium is too hot or too cold, or that the other players aren't all perfect, or I might have to contribute once in a while to keep the stadium going? What a goofball, right?

So folks, **here's the point**. What do we think we're doing when we do that to God and His Church? How many times do you hear people say this? Well, I don't go to Church services because everybody there's a hypocrite! Or I don't go to Church services because it's too hot or too cold, or every time I go they pass the plate and ask me for my money! Well **first of all**, that attitude **is** hypocritical because you're acting like you have no defects when you do! And **second of all**, if the temperature really that big of a deal for you, bring a blanket or a fan! You do when you go to other places, don't you? And **thirdly**, maybe we the Church could afford a better heating and cooling system if everyone pitched in and helped out once in a while! Hello! It's a team! We're supposed to work together, right?

But that's still not all. The **third way** we **do not** fellowship is with **An Attitude of Inaction**. For instance, what if I was confronted by my teammates about my behavior and I had this attitude of inaction.

**Player #1:** "Hey guys, look! It's Billy Croncowski the awesome quarterback of the Beefalo Bills! We found him just in the nick of time! Hey Billy,

where have you been man? The games about to get started and we're headed to the stadium. Are you ready to go? Come on!"

**Billy:** "Oh, yeah...the game. Well, you see guys, I'm going to go to the game alright, but I'm just going to sit here and watch from the sidelines."

**Player #2:** "Say what? What are you talking about? You're the quarterback! We need you!"

**Billy:** "Nope, no-can-do. You see, I think "you guys" got this whole stadium thing wrong here. You see, "I" came to the stadium on "my own terms" and so "you guys" need to fetch "me" some water, preferably some Gatorade, and "you guys" need to make the plays while I critique them, and if you dare lose game, I'm not coming back."

**Player #1:** "What in the world have you been eating? Put the chicken down Billy! Just put the chicken down!"

**Player #2:** Are you nuts Billy! You're the quarterback! We need you! We're all part of a team here, and there is no "I" in the word team you know!

**Player #3:** And what kind of quarterback thinks that all the other players need to do all the work while they just get to sit around and hand out scorecards! Are you crazy! No wonder our season stinks!

**Player #4:** Billy would you knock it off! Stop goofing off and get in the game! We need you! Put...the...chicken...down...now!"

Now folks, how many of you guys say I am totally ruining the Beefalo Bills season this year? Uh huh! I mean, can you believe that? Oh yeah, I'm the quarterback, a vital part of the team, but I expect everybody else to wait on me, and do all the work for me, and win the game for me, and make me feel good! Nice quarterback, huh?

So folks, **here's the point**. What do we think we're doing when we do that to God and His Church? Here you are, a Christian just like everybody else, a vital part of the team, but you just sit around and doing nothing, and you expecting everybody else to wait on you, do all the work, win the game and make you feel good! No wonder we're losing the battle for Amercia! We've forgotten that we're a team, and that everybody is needed to win the game! Amen?

People, I'm telling you, if we're ever going to get rid of this goofball wretched disease called Churchianity, it is high time that we in the Church get back to fellowship, true Fellowship, godly fellowship, and start partying and being a benefit the Body of Christ once again! And people, I'm telling you, once we get back to that, we're not just in a position to be encouraged individually in our walk with God, but God'll start using corporately to encourage the walks of others, like He did for this guy.

“Alexander Ogorodnikov became an Orthodox Christian in 1971 while a student at the Cinematography Institute of Moscow. He tried to use his skills to make a film about his generation's search for the spiritual. He was expelled from the Institute, ending his career in films.

The year following his expulsion, Ogorodnikov founded the ‘Christian Seminar.’ Its purposes were to provide fellowship, theological study and a strong witness of Christian values to the atheistic system. Started outside Moscow, it spread to several Soviet cities. The KGB followed members of ‘Christian Seminar’ groups, harassing, beating, and often arresting them.

Alexander was arrested in 1979 and sentenced to one year in a labor camp for 'parasitism' because he could not get a job due to his Christian beliefs. Then a five-year prison term, plus six years internal exile, was added in 1980 for 'anti-Soviet agitation and propaganda.'

Most of his imprisonment was spent in the Perm-36 labor camp in the Gulag, called the 'death-sentenced zone.' It was one of three camps where some of the most famous dissidents served time in the 1970s and 1980s.

Everything in the camp was a form of torture. 'The basic means of oppression is the exhausting, coerced slave labor for one's ration and the camp gruel,' he wrote, 'The tedious work, the regimen, the rations, the sleep, the uniformity – all are directed at reducing you from the high calling of the image and likeness of God to a dull, apathetic slave-animal state, capable of snatching the shadow of an opportunity to stuff your sucking belly.'

The slightest violation of the regimen can result in the punishment isolation cell – the measure of education favored by our correctors.

There, herded into a closed area of utter hopelessness, cut off from the world, blindly isolated in a deathly silence broken from time to time by the swearing of the guards and the rattle of keys, hounded by cold, measuring the long, tiring day in small steps, you are acutely aware of how your spirit has been pounded into your flesh, and you are only a small, pitiful creature being torn apart by hunger and cold.'

Isolated from the world and his fellow prisoners, living in the cold twilight of the Siberian winter days in cells where the walls and ceilings were entirely coated with ice, deprived of his Bible and his notebooks by prison guards, deliberately and systematically humiliated, in ill health, having lost much of his eyesight and most of his teeth, the hardest thing for Ogorodnikov was the sense that he had been forgotten.

'I feel so alone, so forgotten... Those prisoners on whose behalf a lot of noise is made are not only released upon the expiration of the sentences, but receive better treatment in the camp. The less publicity, the more vulnerable the prisoner becomes.'

Ogorodnikov continued to receive harsh treatment. An additional five years had recently been added to his sentence, this time for 'violating camp

discipline' (wanting his Bible returned). He had not received one letter, not even from his wife and young son. He was forced to conclude that the Christian community had forgotten him. 'Will not the universal Christian Church say at least a word in support of one of her persecuted sons – errant and sinful, but still her son?' Death seemed his only escape.

His words did not fall on deaf ears. In May 1986, Ogorodnikov's friends in Moscow wrote an appeal to Christians in the free world to mobilize and free their suffering brother in Christ. Open Doors, along with many other organizations, started letter-writing and prayer campaigns. British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher heard of Ogorodnikov's plight and interceded with Soviet President Gorbachev on Ogorodnikov's behalf.

On February 14, 1987, ninety-nine months after he was arrested, less than a year after his desperate letter to his mother, years before his new release date, Ogorodnikov was picked up from the camp by his sister and her husband. The other inmates refused to start work on the second shift before they were satisfied that he had truly been allowed to leave.

'I bow my head in deepest gratitude for your prayers and compassionate activity in defense of your Russian fellow-Christians,' Ogorodnikov wrote to those who prayed and campaigned for him. It is in the concentration camps – as you are buried in the tomb-like twilight of solitary punishment cells, when the heart begins to fail, when hunger gnaws your belly, the cold numbs your flesh and desperation courses through your blood – then it seems that an indifferent world has already consigned you to the grave, and despair washes over you like a tide.

But it was in these terrible moments in icy cells that I physically felt the warmth of your prayers and compassion, a force linking us by a stream of spiritual energy generated by mutual experience of faith and the mysterious bonds of fraternal unity.'"

Where has the beauty gone? Where is that powerful attraction of the Church to the lost today? Why don't we see miracles in the church today on a regular basis like it was in the early Church? Well, maybe it's simply because we've forgotten what the early Church knew so well. That when

you first get saved...you don't go home and sit! You go to Church services and you start to party! You **immediately** get busy partying with the **Bible**, you immediately get busy **helping** other people on the team, and you immediately crank up the tunes and get busy **praising** God and **praying** for other people like those Christians did for Alexander Ogorodnikov, and amazing things start to take place! Oh, that we would get back to true, godly, powerful, honest fellowship, amen? I think that's exactly what the world is waiting for! And what's precisely what is missing in the Church today!

And that's why if you're here today and you're suffering from this horrible wretched disease called Churchianity and fellowship to you has become something dry, stale, stupid, and boring and the last thing on your list, then I've got good news for you. It doesn't have to be this way! You see, sometimes before you can move forward in your walk with Jesus Christ, you just need to get **Back to the Basics, the Basics of True Fellowship**. And get back to partying with **God and His people** make a difference with your life, because every player is needed if we're going to win the game, amen? That's what gets rid of the disease. Amen?

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To find the way to God, to understand the *truth* of God's Word, and to received the gift of eternal *life*, begin by repentance and faith through a prayer like this:

“Dear God, I understand that I have broken Your Law and sinned against You. Please forgive my sins. Thank You that Jesus suffered on the cross in my place. I now place my trust in Him as My Savior and Lord. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.”

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