

Grow Your Fellowship

Gen 1:27 - Eccl 4:9-12 - Acts 2:42

Crosspoint – Dave Spooner – Aug. 6th, 2023

Intro:

- Today we are starting a short four-week series (we will return to our John series in September) to lay the foundation for launching our growth groups which will also begin in September. Michael and I will be tag-teaming this series to help us grow in our understanding of the critical role of Christian community in the life of every believer. Through this series, we want to encourage everyone to consider and then commit to a growth group (you will hear more about this in upcoming weeks).
- The apostle Paul, reflecting upon the churches he was connected to, said this to the church in Thessalonica:

2 Thess 1:3 NIV

We ought always to thank God for you, brothers and sisters, and rightly so, because your faith is growing more and more, and the love all of you have for one another is increasing.

- This is my same prayer to God when I think about Crosspoint. I thank God that your faith is growing more and more. The love all of you have for one another is increasing, and we are increasing (so it is becoming harder to know everyone) which is one reason we still have nametags and are completing a picture directory. It is hard to find time to keep up with a dozen people, let alone twenty-five dozen people plus.
- But it is important and critically vital for us to know people and to be known by people. Christian community really matters, and this is a primary reason why we are launching growth groups. Today we are going to focus on growing in fellowship with each other. You were designed for it, you will thrive in it, and you must commit to it.
- The word “fellowship” is primarily used in Christian circles. I have never heard a non-Christian use the word, unless they are a huge “Lord of the Rings” fan. People ask how was the game, or the concert . . . we don’t say “we had great fellowship.” Even with Christians the word is not used very much.
- Churches have rooms we call “Fellowship Halls,” and we have one right underneath us. It usually means a large room to eat, talk, and hang out. But fellowship is not a space. It is a connection; it is a commitment, a covenant, a bond, a brotherhood.
- The biblical Greek word is “koinonia,” which we translate “fellowship.” It means “close relationship, sharing, partnership, *interwoven connectivity*.” New Testament fellowship is far deeper than common human friendships. Fellowship, at its best, is comprised of deeply committed relationships, that is, covenant allegiance that lasts through thick and thin, through pain and inconvenience and awkwardness and annoyance, held together by the Holy Spirit, built on the bedrock of our faith with Jesus Christ as the cornerstone.
- This type of community and connection is what you were created for. You are hardwired and designed for fellowship.

You are designed for fellowship.

Gen 1:27 NIV

So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

- God created humankind in His own image. A significant element of this design is that we were created to be in connective community. We were created for relationships. It is hardwired in our DNA. God has always existed in community, and interconnected and interwoven relationship is an element of who God is. Being made in His image means we were also made for this.

Gen 2:18a NIV

The Lord God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone.”

- He did not say this as an afterthought, like “I didn’t think of this before.” The whole creation narrative is set up purposefully so that we would understand that it is not good for us to be alone. *You may have the gift of singleness, but none of you have the gift of separateness.* We don’t do well in isolation.
- Do you guys remember covid? You know that time in world history when we were all super closely connected with each other, thinking the same way and spending all of our time together? You know the exact opposite was true, and we still are dealing with the lingering effects of being isolated.
- There are groups that have studied the mental health effects of the pandemic, and here is what they have found: Symptoms of anxiety and depression increased during the pandemic with increased, lingering, and persistent feelings of hopelessness and sadness. Deaths due to drug overdose increased sharply across the total population coinciding with the pandemic and more than doubled among adolescents. Alcohol-induced death rates increased substantially during the pandemic, with rates increasing the fastest among people of color and people living in rural areas. Suicide deaths increased, along with self-harm and suicidal ideation¹.
- Mayo Clinic’s prescribed treatment plan for dealing with these issues is to take care of your body, take care of your mind, and connect with others by making connections, doing something for others, and supporting family members and friends.² The medical community’s diagnosis and prescription confirm how God designed us and what He told us from the beginning: it is not good for us to be alone. We are designed for and thrive in fellowship.

You will thrive in fellowship.

- God’s word has a ton to say about relationships, how to make them, maintain them, and the benefits of having them. I have chosen one passage to focus on that talks about the benefits of relationships. This was more than likely written to King Solomon, and the place it is most commonly quoted is at weddings. Even though this is applicable to marriage, its greater context is for all relationships.

¹ <https://www.kff.org/coronavirus-covid-19/issue-brief/the-implications-of-covid-19-for-mental-health-and-substance-use/>

² <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/coronavirus/in-depth/mental-health-covid-19/art-20482731>

Eccl 4:9-12 NIV

Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor: 10 If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up. 11 Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone? 12 Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.

- Did you catch all the benefits of interwoven relationships?
 - Production – (v. 9) two produce much more than one alone (workforce Ill.)
 - Perseverance – (v.10) two go much farther and finish better than one alone (tough mudder)
 - Preservation – (v. 11) two replenish each other and keep the flame alive (charcoal. Ill)
 - Protection – (v. 12) two can protect each other. There is safety in numbers (animals, war)
- A cord of three strands is not quickly broken; we are stronger and better together. (Yarn ill.) Scientists of all sorts have examined the benefits of relationships, especially long-term relationships, and they have found that being in relationship lowers rates of anxiety and depression, adds meaning, decreases stress³, causes higher self-esteem, greater empathy, and makes one more trusting and cooperative. Strong, healthy relationships can also help to strengthen your immune system, help you recover from disease, and may even lengthen your life.⁴
- Relationships are what we are made for, and in them, we thrive. You must commit yourself to them with intentionality and devotion to those who have a shared faith and commitment.

You must commit to fellowship.

- This is exactly what the early church did.

Acts 2:42 NIV

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

- Notice they *devoted* themselves to this. This is where they spent their time, attention and effort. This is what they gave their lives to and spent their lives on. This was no half-hearted attempt. This was not, “I will get to it when I have time,” or it “probably would be a good idea.” They gave themselves to it, they devoted themselves to it. And if you want to have fellowship, you must devote time to it, energy to it, and effort to it.
- Because of love, we share our very lives with each other.

³ <https://acendahealth.org/4-benefits-of-healthy-relationships/#:~:text=Healthy%20relationships%20can%20decrease%20stress,presure%20and%20stronger%20immune%20systems.>

⁴ <https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/healthyliving/Strong-relationships-strong-health>

1 Thess 2:8 NIV

We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us.

- We share the foundation of the gospel together, which is the most important thing. But we can share in the gospel and not share our lives. If you want to truly have fellowship, our lives must be shared as well. This is what you have to do. Open the door to your life, and in so doing, you will interact and interconnect with others more significantly and profoundly. The greatest thing in the world is to be fully known and fully loved. (See also Col 3:12-15, Rom 12:15-16, 1 Cor 12:25-26.)
- And finally, Jesus commanded us to love.

John 15:12-13 NIV

My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. 13 Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends.

- It is weird that love can be commanded. This means that to love others, we must choose to love, and we do this by laying down our lives. This means that we “lay our lives down” on a day by day, bit by bit basis. This is not just one time at the very end, but in everyday types of laying down our lives. (See also 1 John 3:16-18, 3:23-24, 4:20-21.)
- Why does Jesus give us this command? Because He knows this is the best way for us to live and this is what is best for us. So what are you waiting for? Commit yourself to real relationships and devote yourself to them because you are made for them, and you will benefit and thrive in them.
- This is the season to grow. Let's commit ourselves to grow in faith and increase in love, one for another.