



THE COMPASS

A TOOL FOR DISCIPLERS

Fellowship

Conversation On the Journey

John Donne said, “No man is an island.” Even Hillary Rodham Clinton agrees when she says, “It takes a village to raise a child.” But when it comes to the Christian experience, many people keep it hidden and private, relegating matters of the spiritual to the silent and secret parts of life.

To admit that we don’t have our spiritual acts together seems like a shameful admission of ignorance and weakness. But let’s face it. Who really has their act together? Richard Foster, in *The Celebration of Discipline*, says that what keeps us from true fellowship is a wrong perspective on the body: we see it as a gathering of saints, before we recognize it as a group of sinners. We think that everyone else has arrived at a point of saintly holiness and spiritual perfection, so we are ashamed by our growth - or lack of it. But no one is perfect. We are all fallen, and we need each other.

Why do we need each other? As bones need ligaments to connect and support, and the body needs skin to protect the tender and squishy parts, so we need one another for connection, support, and protection.

Gathering with other believers benefits us with: encouragement when we need a dose of courage, teaching to educate us about God and the Bible, and correction when we are spiritually sluggish or off-base.

Biblical Perspective

Read Acts 2:42-47

Ask them, “What are some of the hallmarks of their fellowship together? In what ways have you experienced these?”

Read Hebrews 10:24-25

Here, I usually say, “It seems people have always been in the habit of not wanting to meet together.” Then I ask, “What makes you not want to spend time in fellowship?” “What’s the worst part of it?”

This Week’s Excursion

The letters of the New Testament are seasoned with encouragement to gather with other believers. Classic passages like Hebrews 10, Ephesians 4, and 1 Corinthians 12 remind us that every Christian is vital and necessary, possessing gifts that serve the church at large with a specific purpose.

Fellowship is considered the bond of common purpose and devotion that binds Christians to one another and to Christ.

Your objective with this lesson is to help the disciple understand the importance of Christian fellowship, and to motivate them to flavor their lives with the sweet fellowship of Christians.

[Continued >>](#)

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In Ephesians 4:1-16, one is struck again with how valuable fellowship is. It's membership in the body of Christ, and each of us has a role to play in the body. Stress the fact that Paul sees the fellowship of Christians as God's heavenly kingdom displayed and functioning now, on earth. Ask, "When you think of our fellowship, what mirrors God's eternal kingdom, what is lacking?"

Read 1 Corinthians 12

Obviously there is much to be gained from the gifts and ministry others offer. But an important question for them to consider is: what do they uniquely add that others would miss if they weren't a part of the ministry? How does God seem to use them?

Take the time and go through this passage pulling out other questions that would be helpful to ask.

Discuss with your disciple what Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a German theologian who was killed by the Gestapo, wrote about the value of fellowship and community:

...the Christian needs another Christian who speaks God's Word to him. He needs him again and again when he becomes uncertain and discouraged, for by himself he cannot help himself without belying the truth. He needs his brother man as a bearer and proclaimer of the divine word of salvation. He needs his brother solely because of Jesus Christ. The Christ in his own heart is weaker than the Christ in the word of his brother; his own heart is uncertain, his brother's is sure. (Life Together - pg 23.)

Some questions to start discussion:

How have you experienced both parts of what Bonhoeffer is talking about?

How have you been the one who needs, and the one who is needed?

How have both of you benefited from fellowship?

Brainstorm together a list of reasons why fellowship can help one grow in Christ.

†End

Next Steps

Challenge them to commit to regular times of fellowship with other believers. This can be a specific time set aside to have lunch with friends in Bible study, or hanging out with others after a weekly meeting.

Since one of the hurdles to people walking with the Lord is a lack of connectedness to others, encourage your disciple to meet new people in the large group. They could have "interview lunches" during which they invite a few people to a meal with the clear purpose of getting to know them. Help the disciple think through people to "interview" and questions to ask if the conversation gets stuck. Having an arsenal of questions is a great resource to rely upon!

Side Trails

Life Together. Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

Celebration of Discipline. Richard Foster. (Chapter 10 on the "Discipline of Corporate Confession")

Being the Body. Chuck Colson. Thomas Nelson Publishers.

Community 101. Bilezikian. Zondervan.

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