



# VILLAGE BIBLE CHURCH SUGAR GROVE CAMPUS

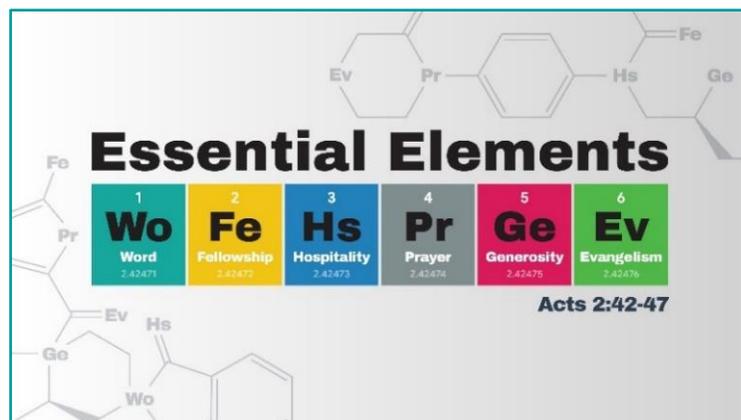
## Fellowship: A Neglected Essential

### Essential Elements

### Various Scriptures

Tim Badal | September 4, 2022

Turn in your Bibles this morning to 1 John. We'll be using this as a springboard text, as we continue in this series titled "The Essential Elements," looking at things that should be part and parcel of the life and ministry of any church. We've talked about the essential elements of preaching from God's Word, being devoted to prayer and being extravagant in our generosity.



Then last week we heard an incredible story from our missionaries in New Guinea, Ben and Missy Hatton, taking the element of evangelism and missions to a group of people who had never heard the gospel. We saw how this gospel message is changing the lives of the Amdu people in New Guinea. They also challenged us to take this same gospel to our workplaces and schools, anticipating the same results right before our eyes.

We have two more essential elements that we've been drawing from the book of Acts. In Acts 2 we have the story of the birth of the church, seeing a model for any church that longs to be biblical and seeks to honor and glorify Christ in all they say and do. There are two more elements present in this chapter: fellowship and hospitality. In some ways, these are two sides of the same coin. I'm going to concentrate on one side of the coin so I don't preach next week's sermon, which in many ways is the application of this week's sermon. Today however, we're going to focus on the essential element of fellowship, then next week we'll see how that can be lived out through hospitality. Our attention today will be on how the church should be devoted to fellowship.

As we read in Acts 2:42, the early believers *"devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers."* Over the next 30 minutes or so, we'll be devoting ourselves to what God's Word says to us as His people about the subject of fellowship, then we'll close our service by breaking bread together as we participate in the Lord's Supper, reminding us of the unity we have with God and the unity we have with one another.

As many of you know, a little over a year ago I lost my mom. I was asked recently by a friend, on the anniversary of her death, what I miss most. I would have thought my answer would have been something really significant, but I was surprised by my simple answer, "I miss all the little things." I do miss the big things now that she's gone, but I now realize all the small things that stand out to me, things that are holes in my life.

When it comes to fellowship, I wonder if many of us might have that same thought about fellowship. We don't know what we've got until it's gone. Because fellowship in some ways is going on all the time, we can neglect to see the significance in even the small things, as I did with my mom. Now that she's not here, the voids in our family seem much larger. Some of us don't know how good things are regarding fellowship, because we can take it for granted. We don't know how good God's grace is through those around us, because they're always with us, until they're not here anymore.

The early church reminds Christians that not only are we to be in fellowship with God, but we are to be in fellowship with one another. In fact, John wrote in 1 John that we can't say we have fellowship with God if we don't have it with other believers. We've learned a lot from John through his Gospel, but now he opens this first letter by saying this:

<sup>1</sup> That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life— <sup>2</sup> the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us.

John is basically saying, "I know Jesus." He then continues, *"That which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you..."* Why? *"...[S]o that you too may have fellowship with us."* The reason you and I will have fellowship with one another is because of our relationship with Jesus.

We need to understand how essential fellowship was to the early church. They couldn't live without it. They didn't just go to church one time a week. In fact, we read in Acts 2:42-47, they realized not only did they need fellowship with God on a daily basis, they also needed daily fellowship with one another, assembling in each other's homes. But the need for fellowship isn't just a Christian thing. Men and women everywhere need it.

Growing up I remember a song you probably knew as well, that spoke of our need for others and for deep relationships. The song said:

Making your way in the world today  
Takes everything you've got  
Taking a break from all your worries  
Sure would help a lot  
Wouldn't you like to get away?

Sometimes you want to go  
Where everybody knows your name  
And they're always glad you came  
You want to be where you can see  
Our troubles are all the same  
You want to be where everybody knows your name

Some of you have no idea what I'm talking about. That number one TV show struck a nerve in America. It wasn't because of the actors or the incredible plot line, but because for one half-hour a night, you got to go where everybody knew your name. The world longs for fellowship.

I want you to know that one of the things Christ died for was not only to redeem us back to Himself, but to grace you and me with the fellowship we long for. The devil wants to break up this great gift God has given His church, so there are a lot of things that keep us from knowing other people's names, getting involved in other people's lives, experiencing the oneness God designed us to have.

So today I want to address three things looking at the basis of fellowship, the barriers that keep us from fellowship, then finally the blessing that comes from fellowship. I hope this framework will help us meditate on and evaluate our fellowship with God and with one another. Then at the end of this service we will have fellowship as we partake of the Lord's Supper.

## The basis for our fellowship

If we truly want to experience the fellowship we were created to enjoy, we need to ask what it involves. Twenty different times the New Testament speaks about fellowship, but sometimes in different ways. One of these is the idea of sharing things in common. In other places it refers to a partnership of some sort. In yet other places it speaks of a deep bond that exists between two individuals. Finally, it describes an active participation where a person is ministering to the needs of others for their good.

How do we put all of these different definitions together? **Fellowship is the act of engaging other Christians in deep interactions and relationships because of the common things we share and the Bible's clear calling for us to live out a "one another" lifestyle.**

Did you know that God created us from the beginning to have fellowship with Him? Unlike every other part of creation, God created you and me to have fellowship with Him. In the Garden, before there was sin, man had a perfect relationship with God and was doing God's work in the world God had created. After everything else was declared to be good, God said one thing was not good. Even though Adam had dominion over the Garden and had named all the animals, God said, "It is not good for man to be alone." That hasn't changed. I might even say that in a world of sin, we need each other more now than Adam did in the Garden.

When Christ came to redeem us from our fallenness, He restored the fellowship we had with God. At the same time, He also redeemed the fellowship we lost with one another. So within the church, the essential element of fellowship is necessary because Christ died for it. Now we have the ability to experience something we never would have experienced apart from Him.

## The same faith

The first basis for our fellowship comes from the fact that we have the same faith. Through the work of the Holy Spirit, you and I have come to the same realization that this Book tells us the truth about ourselves, our Creator, our sin and our Savior. By faith we believe what this Book has to say and have come to depend on it to lead and guide us in order that we might please God in everything we say and do. This Book is what unifies us as Christians.

We come from many different places and backgrounds. We come as men and women. We come as rich and poor. We come from different ethnicities. We come from good lives and bad lives. We come from times of victory and times of trial. But we all approach this Book on the same footing, believing the same thing. We believe God is our God, but that because of our sin we have been separated from Him. Yet through Jesus Christ you and I can now have life in Him. That's our banner. That's why we can gather together, sing songs, pray prayers and hear the Word spoken. We can be in full agreement on these things.

## The same family

However, something changes between that time and when we start hanging out together. Fellowship begins to break down. According to the Bible, it's not that we just agree to the same principles and a set of propositions about God and ourselves. Because of the work Christ has done, we have been brought into the same family. We share the same DNA.

Amanda and I were recently with some friends and the wife told us one of the craziest things I've heard about in a while. After almost 40 years, her parents finally told her and her siblings that they had another sister. It was a secret the family had kept. Her mom and dad had had a child before they were married as teenagers, so they had given the girl up for adoption. It was a closed adoption and they never talked about it again. Then one day, Mom and Dad had filled out an ancestry.com form and that 40+ daughter had also filled it out, so the website put them together. It was a 100% match.

The adopted daughter was amazed to find out her parents were still together and that she had siblings. Just recently they were able to meet. The woman told me, "I was blown away. She looked just like me! She talked just like us. She had the same humor, the same idiosyncrasies." After 40 years and hundreds of miles of separation, their DNA told the story.

That's why when we gather together, even with strangers, we find believers in our midst with commonality. There's this connection. There's a deeper level of sharing, because we have the same Father. Because we have the same Father and the same faith, we are of the same family. This is a family reunion.

## The same focus

Because we're part of the same family, you and I also have the same focus. The job of the believer, no matter who we are, is to bring glory to our Father in heaven. The Bible doesn't say to a couple of us, "Do this," then to others, "Do that," and still to others, "Do this." Jesus says, "If you love Me, you will obey My commandments." He's given us the great commandment and a great commission. These are our marching orders. You and I have the same faith, the same family and the same focus. We are moving in the same direction. We want to accomplish the same goal. We are working as a team to become what God has called us to be.

## The same future

Even more than all that, the basis for our fellowship is that we have the same future. Jesus told us, "I go to prepare a place for you, and if I go to prepare a place for you, then I will come back and take you to be with Me forever" (John 14:1-7). I love that we will be fellowshiping with God for all eternity. What an awesome thought!

Yet I want to remind us that along with being with God in heaven, we will be sharing that fellowship experience with many other people. You and I will be there together, along with the saints of old. With all our diversity, God will bring this group together in perfection for all of eternity. We'll do what we're being called to do right now, to have eternal fellowship with one another and with God.

Now, if you're struggling a little with fellowship here, I've got some bad news for you. This is what eternity is going to be filled with. If you really don't like the greeting time, buck up; it's going to be a lot longer than a minute in eternity. We're going to fellowship forever. It's this kind of stuff that ties us together. It's this kind of stuff that should make us tighter than brothers and sisters. It's this type of stuff that should allow our love for one another to cover a multitude of sins. The problem is that's not the case. It's

not where we live. We have allowed barriers to this essential element. We have allowed things in our lives to keep us from fellowshiping with one another as we should. So let's consider some of these barriers.

## The barriers to fellowship

According to Acts 2, the first barrier comes because we're not dedicated to fellowship. Verse 42 says we're to devote ourselves to the apostles' teaching, to fellowship and to the breaking of bread. I want you to picture coming to church, then I walk up here and say, "Hey, good morning church. It's so great to have you with us this morning. Um, I don't have anything to tell you today. I knew there was something I needed to do this week. I knew my calendar said 'study,' but I just don't have anything. So let's just close in a word of prayer and go on our way."

I think a lot of you would say, "Wait a minute, Tim. You did not devote yourself to this important thing. Church isn't church unless we hear a message. You have failed in accomplishing that to which you were supposed to be devoted, so my church experience was not what it should have been."

How often do we come to church with no intention whatsoever of really fellowshiping with people? We come, we listen, we sing some songs, we participate in prayer. We walk in and we walk right out. No interaction. No fellowship. No nothing. There are people who are okay with this.

This is a phenomenon that's been growing, especially over the last two decades, and writers have written about it. They speak of church people who are going into church to be "unseen." People want to remain anonymous. To go to church to be unknown is a contradiction in terms. You don't go to church just to be a face in the crowd. You go to church so everybody can know your name, so you can know their name, so you can fellowship with them and do life with them.

Has it ever dawned on you that the very reason you come to church isn't for what you get out of church, but for what you are to give someone else? Do you realize God placed you in this church, in this service, next to that person, for a reason? Maybe your job is to tell that person who's brand new here about Jesus and your experience with Him. Maybe God led you here this morning so you might be an encouragement to someone else, that you might hold someone accountable, that you might challenge or comfort or minister to someone. Could it be that God has you here, not for what you're going to get, but for what you're going to give? If we don't accomplish this, it may be because of certain barriers.

### We have selfish attitudes.

We live in a country that has built its greatness on the premise that we pull ourselves up by our own bootstraps. This rugged individualism—this John Wayne approach that says, "I can do this; I don't need anybody's help" —may make for an incredible American romantic story, but it isn't what the Bible teaches.

The Bible speaks of doing life in community and collectively making a difference together. Some of us hear this and the curse word "socialist" comes to mind. That's too much for us. "No, I'm on my own. I don't need anybody." The Bible says it was not good for you to be alone. That's why God has given us helpers. This is not a marital concept; this is a human concept. God has given us people to make us better. The problem comes when you add another person who then has a say, has feelings, needs time and attention. Now you can't just think about yourself; now you need to think about them.

To illustrate this, some years ago one of my sons was fiddling around at home, doing nothing, and I said out of exasperation, "Hey, why don't you call so-and-so and get together?" It was a friend whom he liked a lot. He said, "No, Dad, I don't think so." "Wait a minute. Don't you want to hang with him?" "Yeah, but it's too much." "What do you mean, it's too much?"

He said, "If I invite my friend over, then I've got to do what he wants to do." I thought, "You nailed it. You're selfish to the core, but you nailed it. You're absolutely right."

If I invite others into my realm, now I've got to worry about them. Now I've got to watch what they want to watch. I've got to talk about what they want to talk about. God forbid, I've got to listen to what they're talking about. I can't do what I want, when I want and how I want. Some of us are approaching church with an individualism that says, "It's all about me. The second I add anyone else into the mix, now I've got to worry about them. I'd rather just do it by myself."

I was talking with an individual after the first service who said, "I've got a daughter and that's how she is. She does church online. She never goes to church. She's never engaged with anybody else. She tells me it's just too hard." She's right. Relationships are hard and come with struggles. We can't just worry about ourselves; we have to worry about other people. This isn't a new phenomenon.

We read in Philippians 2:1-4 (NKJV):

Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.

The only way you and I will have fellowship is if we get our eyes off ourselves and on to other people. Because of sin, you and I could never have fellowship with God. Do you know what Jesus had to do? He had to put on flesh and make His dwelling among us. He had to come near and fellowship with us. If we need this, why wouldn't others need it in their lives? But selfish attitudes get in the way.

### **We have shifted our associations.**

There's a cultural movement that has impacted the church in the last seven to ten years. It is that what we need for fellowship is unanimity, not unity. There's a difference between those two. The Bible never speaks of unanimity, especially among human beings. It talks about unity over and over and over again.

Unanimity says you and I are the same. We're twins. We do everything the same way. We feel the same way, we think the same way. Everything is the same. Unity speaks of differences which are brought together under the same cause that's bigger than personal feelings, thoughts, endeavors or dreams. So we sacrifice for the greater good, thus causing two to become one.

The church used to pursue unity—different people with different feelings and different thoughts—coming together, to be one. We have now fallen in line with the pundits who say, "If there's not unanimity—that is, you are all the same—then that person is your enemy." The problem is that there are enemies in this world, right? The Bible talks about enemies, but we have made the litmus test for fellowship to be that someone has to agree with you wholeheartedly, even on debatable matters, otherwise you break fellowship.

To help understand this, let's recognize that there are three levels where unity needs to be fleshed out.

1. Our convictions. These are the things we hold dear. As Christians, these are the things that are plainly spoken of in the Scriptures. Who Jesus is. Who we are. How we get to Jesus. How we please God. These are convictional things. We can't have fellowship with an individual who doesn't believe what we believe about Jesus. It just isn't going to work. You cannot have biblical fellowship with someone who says, "Yeah, I thought Jesus was a wonderful guy, but he's not God." We have a problem with that; we'll never have unity because we're so far apart. But the problem in the church isn't that we're fighting over these convictions. Rather, we start fighting over the next two things: issues of conscience and choices.
2. Our issues of conscience. These are things we can debate. We'll do these things differently. It might be what we eat or drink. It's how we raise and educate our kids. Maybe one person in the Bible does something one way, and another person does it differently, then both are commended for their faith. We might wonder, "How can I interact or fellowship with someone who sees this differently than I do?" Here is where we need to go to the Scriptures, realizing there is not always one clear answer.
3. Our choices. This third level can get even worse. These are things the Bible doesn't even speak about. We sometimes say, "I can't fellowship with someone based on their choices." Think about the two years of debating over a piece of fabric over our faces.? Just so everyone knows, the Bible doesn't say anything about wearing a mask during a pandemic. Believe it or not, churches have split over this. People have said, "I can't fellowship with those people." You're right—you can't, because you're being selfish. You're pursuing choices the Bible hasn't even spoken about.

Keep in mind that the world is watching us. I've read a lot by secular writers during these last couple years And they're just blown away by how much infighting has been going on within the church. They're saying, "I thought they were about love. I thought they were unified, but they're divided." It's not because of Who Jesus is, the key tenets of the faith, the creed or what the Bible has clearly stated. Rather, fellowship has been broken because we've elevated conscience decisions and choices to be biblical truths,

when they're not. Fellowship is what makes it possible for you to become better by allowing people who are very different from you into your life.

God has graced me with a partner in ministry. Now you're probably thinking I'm going to Amanda—who is by far the best partner I have. But I'm speaking of a partner in ministry who's very, very different than me. For 25 years now Keith Duff and I have ministered together. If you know Keith and you know me, you know we are very, very different. I'm loud; he's quiet. I'm a fool; he's wise. I'll eat anything on four legs; he doesn't touch any of that. I'm an athlete; he doesn't play sports. I mean, we're just so different. It used to irritate both of us, until both of us recognized that God placed each of us into the other's life to make us better.

I want you to know what you're giving up by re-arranging your fellowship, by just being around people who are like you, who vote like you and who hold to certain things like you do. Some of you think, "I can't. They wear hats. I can't, they vote for that person. They must not be a believer." You've just disfellowshipped in an area the Bible doesn't address. Be very, very careful. The Bible says we are to love one another like a family. The blood of Jesus Christ transcends all of that. Your issue with fellowship right now, your uneasiness, is because you've allowed choices to become creeds. God says we are to have fellowship with one another, just as we have fellowship with Him. But we've turned our choices into barriers to the fellowship God wants us to have.

Could it be that God wants to make you better by introducing you to someone who is very, very different? Someone who loves the Lord with all their heart, but does things very, very differently than you do. Now, I'm not talking about sinning or going against the Scriptures, but in areas of conscience and choice, they live life differently than you do. Can you see the good that not only they have, but the good they can bring into your life? I've come to realize that some of the people who are the most different from me are some of the best blessings that have ever come into my life. They show me stuff about God I never would have known without them.

### **We are swamped with activities.**

One of the reasons we have barriers to fellowship is that we're just swamped with other activities. We just don't have time for it. Listen, the Badal calendar is very full these days. We have a lot of sports. Work is busy. There are a lot of activities in our lives.

How is it we can go an entire week interacting with the unbelieving world and it never dawns on us that we should interact with other believers? Surely there should be some time, some opportunity for this. Maybe it means turning off the technology, getting out of our comfort zones and being hospitable (which we'll talk about next week). We can choose to open our hearts to fellowship.

The believers in Acts 2 devoted themselves—they made the conscious decision—to not do something else, so they could create time and space to fellowship because it was important to them. Some of us have taught our children and our families that fellowship isn't important at all. The problem is there will come a time and place where you're going to need other believers around you. It will be hard to start building relationships then. It's in those moments that you'll need relationships to bear the fruit that time, attention, and dedication have built over the years. Which barrier is keeping you right now from fellowship with those you're doing life with?

## **The blessings that come with fellowship**

Here are a couple blessings I want you to think through.

### **It models to the world what God is like.**

Number one, fellowship models to the watching world what the Trinity is like. When I fellowship with you, I'm showing that you're important, therefore I'm going to create time and space for us to interact. I defer to your needs and desires. I speak of you with love, kindness, and respect. This is what fellowship is all about and it is modeled for us by the Godhead. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit defer to one another, love one another, speak well of one another. No doubt they bring encouragement and glory to one another.

We see this in Scripture. The Father says, "This is My Son with Whom I am well pleased." The Son says to the Spirit, "He will do greater things than I have done." It's this love and self-giving of the Godhead that we now have the opportunity as Christ-followers to show the world. This is what our God is all about. Fellowship is sacrifice, love, care and bringing glory to one another, not looking to our own interests but to the interests of others.

## It motivates us to live lives of love.

Fellowships give us the context to be motivated to love. It's very hard to love someone you're not doing life with. Let me give you an example. One of our campus pastors is the news anchor for WBBM Radio, so I often listen to Cisco in the morning. He will talk about horrific things that have happened in the world around us. Now because those things are not in my area code, I've got to be honest with you, I listen, I hear and I move on. But when I enter into fellowship with those people, then it means something. So what I need to do is I need to enter into your world. You need to enter into my world. When we do that we start having love for one another. When one of my boys invites a friend over, then I have to listen to him and do what he wants. I have to empathize with him and sympathize with him. But when we live individual lives, we don't have to love anybody but ourselves.

So this morning you did the hard thing. You got up and you fit into the same room as these people around you. Now don't simply walk in and walk out, but interact and fellowship with them. You've had this shared experience. God has brought you together to show a little bit more of Who God is and what He's about to the other person, so both of you will be better.

So fellowship is way more than just a greet time or snack time in a small group. It is a God-given opportunity for God to use others who are different than you to make you better and allow you to have a better glimpse of Who God is. All this will allow us to worship and adore Him in ways we never would have without others around us. That leads us to communion. This is our opportunity to fellowship with God and is a reminder that we don't fellowship with God alone, but we fellowship with one another. When the Apostle Paul says we need to commune with God, he says, "If there are any sins you have against God, you need to get those right."

There's also an admonition that we're to ask ourselves: "How am I doing when it comes to living life together?" Remember, John said we cannot have fellowship with God and hate our brothers. So as we come to this table, we focus a lot on our vertical relationship with God. In this moment, in this place, I want you to go back to those barriers and ask if there some selfish attitudes in You. Have you shifted some of your associations? Have you swamped yourself with activities that don't allow you to be the blessing God wants you to be in the lives of others?

Then when this service is done, instead of just getting up and leaving, find someone to connect with. Be the hands and feet of Jesus that God calls us to be.

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