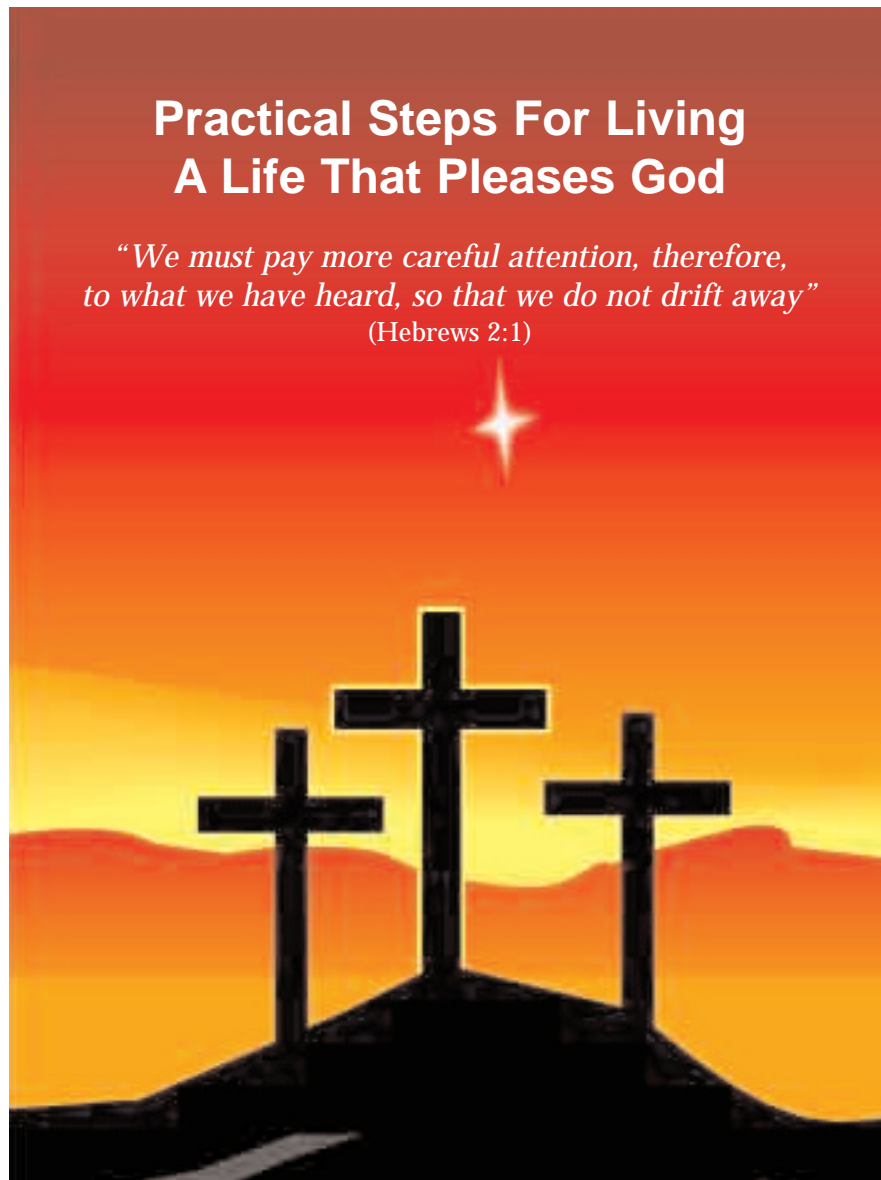


Lifebytes:

26. Will Jesus Find Faith Within You?



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Dear Friends,

An astonishing and poignant question came from the very mouth of Jesus: “*When the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?*” (Luke 18:8). Pretty straight-forward, yet in the western practice of Christianity there seems to be no unanimous “Yes” or “No” in response.

Faith as Belief

Part of this discrepancy comes from the broad definition of what Biblical faith means to people. To the majority of church-goers we’ve met over the years, “faith” connotes little more than belief that God exists and lovingly watches over His creation from above. This kind of “faith” demands little or no responsibility on the individual’s part, ***only to believe***.

But a “faith” which goes no further than the mind’s concept produces “religious Christians”. They “do church” — they sit in a pew, attend Sunday school, maybe meet for scheduled activities on occasion. The quality of their “Christian” life is measured by attendance at religious services and programs.

But they don’t realize they’re living in a “spiritual schizophrenia”, compartmentalizing their *religious lives* and *secular lives* into separate categories. The terrible testimony to this is that:

- ***They fail to see themselves as representatives of Jesus to the world around them,***
- ***and, they conform to the standards of the world just as the worldly do.***

As pollster George Barna has lamented, people who confine their Christianity to defined blocks of time in their weekly life dominate church circles today. They embrace the same worldly values as non-Christians, and their

moral standards are as lax and culturally dictated as those who make no claim to be Christian. This is the testimony of “believers”.

They practice *religion*, or as Paul warns, a *form of godliness that denies its power* (2 Timothy 3:5). They want nothing to do with daily living in Covenant union with our God. A covenant relationship would demand too much from them. And, they don’t want to pay the cost of divorcing themselves from unrighteous ways of the world in order to walk God’s way according to His Word.

All of us should heed Paul’s warning:

You adulterous people, don’t you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God (James 4:4).

You can be sure of this:

Faith that is defined and practiced as a “belief” is not acceptable by the God of the Bible.

Mere belief, or mental agreement, only puts you on par with the demons, as James warns:

You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder (James 2:19).

Agreeing with the existence of God is like believing that gravity exists: it requires no more than passive mental assent. It costs you nothing, nor does it change your life. However, if you decide to disprove gravity by jumping off a cliff, the result will be disastrous. Likewise, refusing to wholeheartedly trust in the Lordship of Jesus is just as fatal to your soul!

Faith as Trust

The other side of the faith-spectrum is the Hebraic understanding of faith — **absolute trust that results in action.** The Hebrew word for “faith”, *emunah* [*em-oo-NAH*], is far more intense than the mere mental assent of belief. The word is pregnant with *steadfast trust* in God, a trust that *endures*.

Faith is an emotional and responsive term that emanates from your heart.

It's a trust in God that produces obedient action.

Confirmation that you have true faith is your obedience *put into action*. You hold nothing back in your desire to live in Covenant union with your Lord. The *joy* of walking in covenant union with Jesus propels you to fulfill His purposes (see Ephesians 2:8-10)!

The zeal of your heart is evidenced in Jesus's description of those who serve Him in His Kingdom:

*The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then **in his joy** went and **sold all he had** and bought that field.*

*Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant **looking for fine pearls**. When he found one of great value, he went away and **sold everything he had** and bought it (Matthew 13:44-46).*

To truly *trust* in God calls you to *wholeheartedly yield* yourself to Him without condition. That yieldedness will be revealed by your choices and your decisions—and manifested through your actions.

You have *no* trusting faith if that trust doesn't lead to action.

In other words, the true measure of your trust is your **faith seen in action**. When Jesus announces, “*For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also*” (Matthew 6:21), the confirmation of your heart's trust in Him is readily seen in your life:

• **what you do on behalf of others.**

“*The King will reply, ‘I tell you the truth, whatever you **did** for one of the least of these brothers of Mine, you **did for Me**’*” (Matthew 25:40; see also James 2:14-17). The true measure of your faith pours out from you through what you do on behalf of others who can never pay you back.

Paul tells us, “*Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the **interests of others***” (Philippians 2:4). Can you see that this command must be *put into action* as you become a conduit for the Spirit of Jesus to lavish mercy and service onto others?

• **what flows from your mouth.**

“*The good man brings good things out of the good **stored up in his heart**, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil **stored up in his heart**. For out of the **overflow of his heart his mouth speaks***” (Luke 6:45).

When you fellowship as family with others who are close to you in the faith, your conversations reveal much about your heart's trust. Remember, true faith flows from your heart, and out of the overflow of your heart your mouth speaks.

The combination of your mouth and your actions reveal whether you are only a believer, or a person of obedient trust. To make a comparison:

A person whose faith is only belief is like a man who watches porn on the internet. He experiences no relational intimacy, and yearns only to satisfy his cravings through secret self-service. This personifies believers “doing church”.

Faith-filled trust is like a man who enters into the covenant of marriage with his whole heart. This man divorces himself from lust’s allure, and experiences daily loving intimacy as he does all he can to please his wife.

Our Personal Observation

Since 1989, when we first began teaching about demonic strongholds, we’ve observed a difference between those who walk in freedom and those who don’t after they’ve been delivered from strongholds.

Followers of Jesus who understand *faith as trust* and who seek to live in trust-based relationship with our Lord with all their heart, continue to *live free to be about His purposes*. They diligently pursue union with Jesus, and will earnestly fight to keep themselves free from anything that hinders the quality of their relationship with Him.

Those who see *faith only as belief* eventually go back into captivity to the demonic strongholds that enticed them before. They *only wanted out of the problems* that plagued them. They never fully wanted a relationship with Jesus as *Lord*. Instead, they choose to live religiously and indulge their sin nature.

This same distinction is vividly demonstrated in John 6:53-67. Some only wanted their flesh to be fed and appeased—what they could *get* from Jesus. But a few others hung onto Him at all cost because of *Who* He was.

Jesus left no doubt when He told the

crowd what the faith of someone who belongs to Him requires: “I tell you the truth, unless you **eat the flesh** of the Son of Man and **drink His blood**, you have **no life in you**” (v. 53).

The **faith-only-as-belief** group confirmed their decision through their withdrawal. They divorced themselves from a relationship that demanded intimate, obedient trust: “From this time **many of His disciples turned back and no longer followed him**” (v. 66).

Yet the **faith-as-trust** followers stayed with their Master. Peter summed up their position:

Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have trusted, and we know that You are the Holy One of God (v. 68,69).

We trust this affirmation is the hallmark of your own heart.

- On the scale that follows, place an X indicating where you and those who know you well in the faith evaluate you today.

Your Faith

Belief < 0—1—2—3—4—5—6—7—8—9—10 > **Trust**

- How do you feel about your level of faith? Honestly, how do really feel?

- If your faith isn’t a “10”, what do you think God wants you to change?

- List the *actions you do* on behalf of others that flow out of your faith. In other words, because of your relationship with your Lord, what do you do that *looks to the interests of others*?

- When you're fellowshiping together, what are the *first* and *most frequent* topics that come out of the mouths of those with whom you speak?

- On the scale below, place an X indicating the nature of conversations among those you fellowship with.

The Outflow Of Your Mouth

Christianese < 0—1—2—3—4—5—6—7—8—9—10 > Testimonies
 (Horizontal: *religious topics*) (Vertical: *Seeing the Father's activity in your life*)

- On the scale below, place an X indicating the nature of the topics *you initiate* within your fellowship.

The Outflow Of Your Mouth

Christianese < 0—1—2—3—4—5—6—7—8—9—10 > Testimonies
 (Horizontal: *religious topics*) (Vertical: *Seeing the Father's activity in your life*)

- If our Father were listening in, would He find gratefulness and recognition of His Presence and intervention permeating your thoughts and speech? Do your words reveal His specific loving and faithful activity on your behalf? In other words, do you *frequently* have testimonies that reveal an event or situation in which you saw your Father act?

Talk this over with your family and faith community.

Your Fellowship Must First Be With God

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ The second is this: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than these.”

(Mark 12:30,31)

Before we discuss the issue of fellowship, we want to review the pre-eminence of love in all relationships. Can there be any doubt from this passage about the *intensity of love* our God requires from us? Just consider how all-inclusive the word “all” is... We cited earlier from Matthew 13:44-46 that biblical faith causes you to “*give up everything for His sake.*” *Nothing* is held back from His Sovereign Lordship.

Our ongoing, ever-deepening love for God is a critical facet of our pilgrimage to salvation: “*For in Christ Jesus the only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love*” (Galatians 5:6). When you stand before Him at the Judgment Throne, the only thing that will matter is whether your trust-in-action grew and expressed itself in love.

Knowing this requirement simplifies things, doesn't it? It boils down to your faith *actively* expressing itself through love. Yet, our Father knows that it isn't easy for His children who live in a visi-

ble, unholy world to grow in their love for an unseen, holy God. [As we'll see shortly, this is where our fellowship with others is so vital in *spurring us on.*]

- On the scale below, place an X indicating how loving you consider yourself to be.

How Loving Are You Toward God?

Unloving < 0—1—2—3—4—5—6—7—8—9—10 > Loving

- How do you feel about where you see yourself?

Talk this over with those close to you.

“We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ”
(1 John 1:3).

The Biblical understanding of fellowship focuses on *relationship*. It entails participation, companionship, a sense of intimate belonging to one another.

Yet, the concept of “fellowship” with-in western Christendom often centers around what people do when they’re with others. When people hear the word “fellowship”, they usually think of a *place* (such as the *fellowship* hall) or an *activity* (a men’s bowling *fellowship*). Few even consider fellowship with God.

The apostle whom Jesus especially loved emphasizes an important point: ***“Our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ.”***

Why should John emphasize *fellowship with God*? And, why does he then

warn people about hanging on to sin, and encourage them to be sure they confess those violations of God’s Word and character?

*God is light; in Him there is no darkness at all. If we **claim to have fellowship** with Him yet walk in the darkness, we **lie** and do not live by the truth.*

But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, His Son, purifies us from all sin.

*If we claim to be without sin, we **deceive ourselves** and the truth is not in us.*

*If we **confess our sins**, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.*

*If we claim we have **not sinned**, we make Him out to be a liar and His word has no place in our lives (1 John 1:5-10).*

Are you getting the apostle’s emphasis? An important point is being stressed in these verses that gives specific comment about fellowshiping with others.

Light and darkness cannot fellowship together. Paul is of the same mind when it comes to our fellowship with others: *“For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or **what fellowship can light have with darkness?**”* (2 Corinthians 6:14).

When is a person considered in “darkness” by God? When he holds onto sin and refuses to confess it.

**God, Who is light,
will not fellowship with those who
refuse to confess their sins.
Thus they remain in darkness.**

**Only those who are light
can have fellowship with God,
and can fellowship with each other.
Only light can fellowship with light!**

Your *confession* — agreeing with God that you’ve violated Him and His ways, and need to turn from that sin — frees you from “darkness” into “light”. It is the crucial step to both your fellowship with your Lord *and* with others who follow Him. When you humble yourself to agree with your Lord that you’ve sinned against Him, your merciful Father ***forgives your sins and purifies you from all unrighteousness.***”

Our confession restores fellowship with our Father and with our Lord Jesus. That restored intimacy with God is crucial, and is too often overlooked when people misunderstand the word “fellowship”.

Let’s review this important point:

When you’re *not* in fellowship with our Lord because of sin you’ve refused to confess, you’re in a state of *“darkness”*.

You are *not* *“light”*, and therefore can have no fellowship with the Father and Jesus.

And, if you’re not in fellowship with God, you can’t have true fellowship with others.

Consider in your heart these warnings in Scripture and how they apply to your fellowship with God:

If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God (Hebrews 10:26,27). [Note that the writer is specifically earmarking *believers* through the use of “we” and “received”

knowledge of the truth.]

No one who lives in Him keeps on sinning. No one who continues to sin has either seen Him or known Him (1 John 3:6). [Don’t be hoodwinked by a counterfeit grace that makes room for you to sin because “you’re already forgiven.”]

No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God’s seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God (1 John 3:9). [Keep your eye on that “*born of God*” refusal to keep on sinning. Again, contemporary western, man-made “Christianity” excuses sin under grace and refers to righteous lives that please God by walking in obedience as “legalism”.]

You can understand how crucial it is in your fellowship with God that you be ready to repent whenever you sin. The Holy Spirit is faithful to itch your spirit with that awareness!

Severe consequences await if you *deliberately continue to sin*. We’ll explore this further when we discuss your fellowship with others. However, James affirms how important it is that we help each other *turn from sin*:

My brothers, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring him back, remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save him from death and cover over a multitude of sins (James 5:19,20).

[In our series, *Discussing How To Restore The Early Church, Lesson 45, FELLOWSHIP IN HOMES*, we discuss *Upholding Communal Righteousness*.

Consider that the *unconfessed sins* of those in your fellowship hinder our Father from answering the prayers of all. We DO have a relational responsibility to one another as brothers and sisters: He purposes for us to be *extended spiritual family*. And we know how effective are the prayers of the righteous who have confessed their sin (see James 5:16-18; also 1 Peter 3:12).]

You need to settle this vital issue for yourself. Please write down your beliefs for each question, and provide Scriptural support for why you believe as you do.

- Can you have fellowship with our Father and His Son, Jesus, if you have unconfessed sin? Yes or no? Describe what you believe unconfessed sin does to your relationship with God.

- Can you have fellowship with others if they are not in fellowship with the Father and His Son, Jesus? Yes or no? Describe what unconfessed sin does to fellowship.

- Can you participate in communion with a person who has unconfessed sin? Is there any consequence to doing this?

- Can you worship God collectively with people who have unconfessed sin? Will that “worship” be acceptable to Him?

Your Fellowship With Others: *Does It Spur or Deter Your Faith?*

“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.” (Hebrews 10:24,25)

Many who have left the Nicolaitan religious system behind have experienced attack, with the above passage of Scripture wielded as a club against them.

On face value it would seem that if you’re not part of a religious establishment, you’re sinning against God. But this passage entails far greater relational depth than people in proximity in a pew or Sunday school class or even a scheduled meeting in someone’s living room.

Ponder this command: *“Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds.”*

As you’ve discovered among our spiritual predecessors who trusted in Jesus in the Newer Testament, you can perceive something wonderful in their relationships:

1. *Fellowship* with others **spurred them on to glorify our Father and Jesus** through praise, worship, and living testimony (1 Corinthians 10:31).
2. Their *fellowship* with each other **spurred their growth in Christ-likeness** (see Philippians 2:12).
3. Their shared *fellowship* **spurred them toward repentance and the narrow gate** (Matthew 7:13; 1 Thessalonians 5:12).
4. Their *fellowship* as extended spiritual family **spurred them to reveal Jesus to the lost** in their daily lives (2 Corinthians 5:18,19).

If these four indicators defined for them the true *fellowship* that sacrificially and lovingly looks to the interests of others, then Hebrews 10:24,25 must be understood in this light today. True *fellowship* *spurs you on* in Kingdom service as you're increasingly conformed to the character of Jesus!

We contend that it's far better to not waste your life feeling comfortable among unrighteous "believers" who think they're "Christian" but have *no fellowship* with our Father and Jesus. Whoever *doesn't* spur you on is supporting and influencing you in lukewarmness in your life. Over time you, too, will only be a "believer", hollow and fruitless.

[See our online series, *Discussing How To Restore The Early Church, Lesson 46, FELLOWSHIP IN HOMES*. A key topic of discussion: *The Relational Influence Of The Righteous Breeds Courage*.

We share the manner in which the righteous *live boldly* for the Lord Jesus. Those

who *live righteously* are attracted to each other. Please explore and discuss this lesson with your family and those close to you in His Kingdom.]

Keep this truism in mind: people are influenced by the relationships they keep! The earliest followers of Jesus clearly understood the importance of righteousness and the character it produces. God's Word — the Hebrew Scriptures — was their guidebook of *how to live* in a way that pleases Him: **"The wicked [unrepentant] man flees though no one pursues, but the righteous are as bold as a lion"** (Proverbs 28:1).

The holy boldness that brings about an active life of trust is the fruit of *righteousness*. This matter of walking uprightly as we represent Jesus to others is critical for us as followers of Jesus. Our faithful God keeps His promise to forgive us when we turn away from that which violates Him, and return to the right path!

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9).

Repentance and confession enable you to be restored to *righteousness* — to be *light* rather than *darkness*.

And, don't think your fellowship with God and with others in Jesus is dependent on your own effort. If you, individually and collectively, are in fellowship with the Father and Jesus, then the *Holy Spirit* is the REAL SPUR in your fellowship family!

First, consider what the Spirit's presence means to you in your belonging to Jesus. HE is the power behind your ability to be *light* and to resist your *dark* sin nature:

You, however, are controlled **not** by the **sinful nature** but by the Spirit, **if** the Spirit of God **lives in you**. And **if** anyone does **not** have the Spirit of Christ, he **does not belong to Christ** (Romans 8:9).

Sobering words! The Spirit’s living, transforming work in you and among those with whom you share genuine fellowship is essential. His presence within each of you guarantees that you truly are in fellowship with Jesus, and that you’re no longer controlled by your sin nature.

Don’t take this truth too lightly! Both elements are essential for true fellowship:

- belonging to Jesus
- free from control of your sin nature.

Our spiritual forefathers in the Newer Testament were *absolutely dependent* on the indwelling Holy Spirit. Long before the Spirit descended on the disciples at Pentecost, the Lord told them (and us) that He works “*not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,*” says the LORD Almighty” (Zechariah 4:6).

Reliance on the Spirit’s presence in fellowship is also key to understanding and correctly applying Hebrews 10:24, 25. Below, Paul alludes to the keen, transformational understanding the Spirit brings when we are with others who truly share like faith.

The apostle also makes clear that those *without* the indwelling Spirit are dependent on the “spirit of the world”, which is contrary to the Spirit of God:

[True followers of Jesus] have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us.

This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in

words taught by the Spirit, expressing **spiritual truths** in spiritual words.

The **man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God**, for they are foolishness to him, and he **cannot understand them**, because they are spiritually discerned (1 Corinthians 2:12-14).

- On the scale below, place an X indicating where you and those with whom you fellowship see yourselves.

Discussion In Your Fellowship

Reason < 0—1—2—3—4—5—6—7—8—9—10 > Trust
(Mind alone) (Holy Spirit)

- How do you feel about where you find yourselves on this chart?

- What indicators in your discussion would indicate the Spirit’s presence in your lives? What kind of discussion might indicate He *isn’t* present?

Talk this over with those close to you.

- If you didn’t indicate a “10” above, what do you think God wants you to change?

The visible evidence that you share the type of fellowship our Father prescribes is that you collectively and communally manifest **love** and **trust-filled**

obedience. These should be growing increasingly over time!

The Bible commands Jesus-followers to **“live by trust, not by what we see”** (2 Corinthians 5:7, CJB). Each person who hungers to follow Jesus needs the support of others to subdue the reign of your carnal reasoning. With that voice silenced, you can develop ever-increasing reliance on the Holy Spirit.

True biblical fellowship keeps you away from giving in to the deceit of your own reasoning. For it is within the deception-prone confines of your reasoning that your sin nature has its greatest influence.

Remember, all sin starts in your mind, the arena of reasoning and rationalization. (See James 1:13,15.)

Our Lord doesn't intend that you try on your own to fight your mental propensity toward sin. This is where true fellowship in the Spirit can bear the fruit of victorious one-anothering:

*But encourage one another **daily**, as long as it is called Today, so that **none of you** may be **hardened by sin's deceitfulness** (Hebrews 3:13).*

- If you weren't a “10” on trust in the last set of questions, how well do people in your fellowship family fulfill Hebrews 3:13 in encouragement to avoid sin's deceit? On the scale below, place an X indicating where they are in encouraging you.

Their Level of Encouragement to You

Never < 0—1—2—3—4—5—6—7—8—9—10 > Daily Encouraged Encouraged

- How do you feel personally about the oth-

ers you fellowship with? How do you feel about the personal support they give you?

- Scrutinize yourself as to the level of encouragement *you give others* in your fellowship. Place an “X” below, indicating the level of encouragement you extend.

Your Level of Encouragement to Others

I Never < 0—1—2—3—4—5—6—7—8—9—10 > I Daily Encourage Others Encourage Others

- If neither you nor they were a “10”, what changes do *you* need to make? And, what recommendations for change would you give *them*?

Let's review the four purposes for fellowship we discussed earlier. *True biblical fellowship* spurs the family in Jesus to *increasingly*: glorify our Father and Jesus; grow in Christ's likeness; be quick to repent and press on to the narrow gate; reveal Jesus to the lost.

Fellowship represents an ongoing pilgrimage! Together with the guidance and empowerment of the Holy Spirit, your family and extended spiritual family are working out your collective salvation.

Our Father's four criteria and purposes for biblical fellowship answer the question “*Why*” He calls you to be in that journey of *interconnectedness* known

as fellowship. Knowing “why” enables you to collectively *align your motives* with our Father’s desire. This is pleasing to Him and a blessing to each of you.

Every human being is made in God’s image, and is loved by Jesus — each needs to know of His sacrifice on their behalf.

Your love for your Lord requires you to lovingly represent Jesus to every person you have contact with. EVERY PERSON!

We know that some of you lament that you can’t find a load-bearing faith family that embraces the four criteria for fellowship.

- We want to propose a question: Are the four purposes for fellowship found in *your own home*? Yes or No? If “no”, which ones are *not* part of your own home interaction?

- What topics fill your conversations in your home? What proceeds out of *your* mouth (see Luke 6:43-45)?

- Do you worship with your family at home during the week? Do you and your family members spontaneously burst into songs of praise from their spirit? Do your family members freely come before our Lord together with petitions, praise and intercession? If not, why not?

- What changes does God want you to make in your own home?

Talk it over with your family.

Fellowship Is *Pilgrimage Together*: Collectively Growing More Christ-like

“This is how we know that we love the children of God: by loving God and carrying out His commands” (1 John 5:2).

Can you think of a simpler way to define how love in your fellowship is expressed?

Love God and carry out His commands!

It’s not hard to see the connection of faith-put-in-action here! Your love for God and for each other is evidenced as you actively obey His commands. This is where ***rhema***, seeking His revealed will, and ***halakhah***, establishing biblical applications for yourselves, is important. Both of these activities are ***Spirit-dependent***—they rely on His guidance and empowerment.

[See our book ***Christian Halakhahs, Loving Jesus Through the Way You Apply His Word***, (a free download) for more on the topics of *rhema* and *halakhah*. Living out your love for God and for others is at stake!]

Biblical fellowship is an *ongoing pilgrimage of transformation* into Christ's likeness. This truth often gets lost in many religious groups and gatherings. Many stagnate into no more than meeting together for the individuals' own comfort and self-serving gratification.

Do you yearn for each person in your fellowship family to mature in their faith so that it brings about actions of love-grounded obedient trust? Then consider the progression of spiritual growth outlined in 2 Peter 1:5-11. Keep in mind the *intense determination* the apostle is calling for:

*For this very reason, **make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge;** (5)*

and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; (6)

and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. (7)

*For if you possess these qualities **in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.** (8) (NIV)*

This progression is like an upward spiral. You *press on* through each of the developmental points again and again as they increasingly become part of your motivation, character and purpose. Your pilgrimage together intensifies in fruitfulness as you “add to” each preceding quality.

You progressively grow in your *knowledge* of Jesus. But note that first you add to your faith *goodness*, or as other translations put it, virtue. Then when you increase in knowledge, you won't get puffed up and lord it over others! In essence, goodness (virtue) is the exact

opposite of the selfishness of your sin nature.

Goodness must come *before* the qualities that follow so that your *heart attitude* toward each will be aligned with that of Jesus. Then you collectively can grow more like Him. Thankfully, genuine living faith produces ever-increasing transformation in cooperation with the Spirit!

Appraise Peter's description of those who give way to complacent spiritual stagnation:

*For he who lacks these qualities is **blind or short-sighted, having forgotten his purification from his former sins.** (9)*

*Therefore, brethren, be **all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you; for as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble;** (10)*

*for **in this way the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied to you.** (11) (NAS)*

The purposes for fellowship must be nurtured in each home, and supported by the extended spiritual family. Your transformational progression *doesn't* occur in scheduled meeting times, but in the choices you make daily in your home, workplace, school, and free time.

“Perseverance”

In the middle of the pilgrimage sequence, Peter indicates that after self-control, you must go through perseverance. Only then can you obtain godliness. We know firsthand that perseverance comes during times of *fiery refinement* so that God can prepare you for further Kingdom purposes! He makes

sure that areas of character dress have been scorched away.

To use another metaphor, you undergo a season of perseverance when our Father prunes you of branches that will hinder your fruitfulness in the future. These are often the “desert experiences” that people on pilgrimage undergo. They may even be an “altar experience” for you to make sure there’s nothing you’re unwilling to sacrifice to lovingly fulfill His will.

In any case, *something* is going to be changed in you during your perseverance trials! You must first yield to His Spirit, giving up or removing that which is un-Christlike. Then He can fill in those behavioral or attitudinal ruts with His nature and character.

During our eleven years at the retreat center we discovered a common hindrance that deterred married couples from *pressing on together* all the way into Christ-like love.

In the vast majority of marriages the wife recognized they were in fiery circumstances but her husband was oblivious. When she confronted him with her pain, he went *backward* in Peter’s progression and sought more *knowledge*, while she wanted to press ahead to get through the fire. We’d admonish the man, “If your wife is in the fire, *you are too*. Jump in and go through it with her!”

On rare occasion we’d encounter a husband who had embraced perseverance but his wife was just looking to escape the discomfort.

But in either case, until both embraced the fiery times together, they couldn’t press onward.

This is also important for your fellowship family: You are called to help each other through the fiery times that *any* of

you are going through. You can’t remain aloof, or view the tough times others are going through as “*their* problem.”

Biblical fellowship is *one body* with many parts. That’s why Paul commands us all, “*If one part suffers, every part suffers with it*” (1 Corinthians 12:26).

Perseverance does more to bind you together in true fellowship than anything else.

Suffering together is God’s design for your communal growth into godliness, brotherly kindness and love. If you try to side-step the suffering of others who are united with you in fellowship, you’ll quench any further spiritual development into Christ’s likeness.

[In our series, *Discussing How To Restore The Early Church, Lesson 29, THE FATHER AND JESUS, Suffering: The Spirit’s Agency For Change*, we discuss suffering as key to embracing the Gospel of the Covenant. Please ponder and discuss this lesson.]

“Self-control; and to self-control, perseverance”

Just before the step of perseverance, *self-control* is called for. Too many errantly think this quality dictates that they refrain from pet sins or other negative behaviors. But that’s incomplete; with that definition, all you’re concentrating on is yourself: ***self-focus***.

There’s an important purpose for self-control *preceding* perseverance. You’re being commanded to resist the self-motivation of your sin nature, and to look outside yourself. To use a familiar phrase, “To walk in someone else’s shoes.”

Everything about your pilgrimage and growth in Christ-likeness *together* is to love and bless others. Isn't this the goal of the passages below?

Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as *more important than himself*; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the *interests of others* (Philippians 2:3,4, NAS).

Whoever wants to become great among you must **be your servant**, and whoever wants to be first among you must be **slave of all** (Mark 10:43,44, NIV).

Then the King will say to those on His right, 'Come, you who are **blessed by My Father**; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and **you gave Me** something to eat, I was thirsty and **you gave Me** something to drink, I was a stranger and **you invited Me** in, I needed clothes and **you clothed Me**, I was sick and **you looked after Me**, I was in prison and **you came to visit Me**' (Matthew 25:34-36).

Every one of these passages involves *follow through* with love-motivated action to meet the interest or need of someone else. That thread of self-denying obedient trust responds with *appropriate action* — the essence of Hebraic understanding!

Self-control, that is, resisting your self-motivated sin nature, opens the way for you to persevere in supporting others.

Peter promised about your *collective* pilgrimage together on earth, "**If you** (plural) **possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.**"

We have an eternal goal set before us to encourage us to keep in step with the Spirit. Let's review this passage again:

Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you; for as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble; for in this way the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied to you (2 Peter 1:10,11,NAS).

The pilgrimage foundation to 2 Peter 1:5-11 cannot be emphasized enough.

Your fellowship family must collectively and cooperatively help each other. That's crucial to all your spiritual growth.

- Scrutinize yourself as to your willingness to help others in their suffering and times of perseverance. Place an "X" below, indicating the level of encouragement you provide.

Your Level of Encouragement to Others

I Never < 0—1—2—3—4—5—6—7—8—9—10 > I Fully
Come Alongside Give Myself

- Describe your own belief concerning the place of suffering in the life of a follower of Jesus.

-
-
- **How do those in your home and in your fellowship family help each other through difficult times on the pilgrimage to your collective salvation?**
-
-
-
-
-

- **Describe what you believe God wants you to change, if need be, regarding support for one another in times of suffering.**
-
-
-
-
-

***“If we walk in the light,
as He is in the light,
we have fellowship with one another,
and the blood of Jesus, His Son,
purifies us from all sin”*** (1 John 1:7)

Just a word of caution:

If you’re endeavoring to fellowship with people who have been “churched” for any length of time, consider their particular perspective. Consider, where are they on the spectrum of *belief and trust*?

All too often the spiritual experience of “churched” people has been a mental agreement with Bible verses or a “decision” for Jesus that called for no repentance, no obedient trust, no determination to follow Him as Lord.

Their efforts to please God, whether through Sunday services attendance,

morally principled lifestyle, or accumulated Bible facts, are “ineffective and unproductive” (referred by NAS as “useless and unfruitful”) if love-grounded obedient trust in Jesus isn’t the source and strength that’s motivating them.

Therefore the whole notion of God’s purposes for fellowship will be foreign to their heart’s motivation. If repentance isn’t the hallmark of their heart, these people will resist and hinder any growth in Christ’s likeness in the hearts of others. You’ll discover that *God’s* purposes for fellowship are mutually unattainable. [Please, stop and review the four purposes again.]

A word of affirmation:

Entering into biblical fellowship is *not* haphazard! It’s akin to entering into a covenant with someone. It shouldn’t be taken lightly, for there are biblical purposes for fellowship that must be mutually agreed to.

When you enter into fellowship with others, you are promising them that you will do all you can through God’s grace to fulfill His four purposes for fellowship.

You are affirming that you will earnestly remain repentant *and* in fellowship with the Father and Jesus.

In that light, you will endeavor to never hold on to unconfessed sin, for then your fellowship family’s prayers would go unanswered by our Father.

God’s definition of ***faith and fellowship*** far surpasses that of man’s. Make sure your way of life aligns with HIS understanding of these realities!