

Discussing How To Restore The Early Church

Returning Intimacy and Power to the Father's Children

*"I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for,
it will be done for you by My Father in heaven.
For where two or three come together in My name, there am I with them."*
(Matthew 18:19,20)



SECTION 6 - LESSON 46

FELLOWSHIP IN HOMES — Extended Spiritual Family:

• Load-bearing Relationships

1. Introduction To Load-bearing
2. The Relational Influence Of The Righteous Breeds Courage
3. Cherish The Children
4. Love Is Demonstrated Through Blessing Others



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FELLOWSHIP IN HOMES Extended Spiritual Family: *Load-bearing Relationships*

1. Introduction To Load-bearing

“Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply from the heart” (1 Peter 1:22).

“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).

Getting together with other followers of Jesus as your extended spiritual family is a wonderful expression of the *love of Jesus* within you! In the previous Lesson we discussed the relational responsibility in our Lord to walk in communal righteousness both individually and collec-

tively. In that way we’re able to access our loving Father’s ear and *bear one another’s burdens* through coming alongside one another and having our prayers answered.

When you uphold communal righteousness within your home and family, you’re bearing the load of your extended spiritual family in the most loving way you can.

As each one remains repentant out of a heart’s desire for intimate fellowship with our Father and His Son, your times *together* as a faith family will glorify our Lord. Out of love from the Spirit for those who are your spiritual family:

You are purposing that you and your household will walk as our Lord wants you to, and will repent when you stumble so that nothing will hinder our Father from answering your extended family’s prayers.

When you gather with your extended spiritual family, what do you hope will reveal that your time together is pleasing to our Father? Two particular points have emerged as vital in the fellowship families we’ve been part of over the years.

1. **We yearned for the presence of Jesus in our midst.**
2. **We welcomed children as an integral part of our times together.**

If Jesus doesn't "show up" in your gathering through the work of His Spirit in your midst, why should you be getting together in the first place? As Head of His *called-out ones*, He promises, "***For where two or three come together in My name, there I am with them***" (Matthew 18:20).

When His family have prepared their hearts by confessing sin so that they're available for His purposes to love and serve Him, then His presence will be manifested as living water of mutual refreshment.

And keep in mind that in Scripture whenever children are mentioned in the same breath as Jesus, the loving warmth of His embrace is right there! We'll discuss this at length later in this Lesson.

What do you think Jesus wants when His people gather together in His Name? How do you think He feels when people gather only for purposes of social self-gratification? Describe the reasons for your response.

Your answer will determine what path your faith family will take in your time together. Be sure you prayerfully consider if you have His heart purpose in mind as you gather.

If there is neither collective, wholehearted desire for the presence of Jesus when you gather together nor determination to be cleansed of sin before you encounter each other, it's like asking the Guest of Honor to not show up.

If you have no responsive love relationship with Jesus, you'll begin to look

for some form of religious contrivance to impart a false sense of "fellowship" to your times together. The gathering will become your lifeline to substitute for the void in your spirit.

For example, many fellowship families as well as congregations use singing and music to "***conjure a soulish mood***" so people will feel good about their worship experience. The songs may produce a soulish high that appeals to your mind and emotions, but doesn't deal with ***why*** you aren't experiencing Jesus in your daily life.

There have been times over the years in our home fellowship family that we've found we've collectively become lukewarm in our walk. Now, we could have gone on with just getting together to talk and sing and share, but our spirits would have starved!

Instead, convicted by the Holy Spirit, as a spiritual family we communally repented and confessed our sins. That purification from His hands brought about a change in both our hearts and in the spiritual atmosphere of our time together. Through His restoration we found ourselves tearfully grateful for His loving mercy to us.

If your extended spiritual family will be diligent to live righteously out of love for Jesus and love for one another, you'll experience the presence of Jesus when you gather. If something seems out of whack when you're together, take the time to see if anyone needs to repent.

Yearn to love God so much that Jesus is manifested in both your daily life as well as your collective times together.

We'll continue to emphasize in the Lessons to follow that you and your fellowship family are interconnected by His Spirit as *brothers and sisters*. Your

opportunities to walk as family occur as you “one-another” according to our Lord’s ways: “Love one another, serve one another, admonish one another.”

There are 54 of these “one-anothers” in the Newer Testament! They’re given to us as ways to experience His fullness in each other’s lives. Frequent contact throughout the week is essential to help each of us walk righteously and lovingly:

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).

Frequent contact is one of the many interpersonal faith enactments of what we call “**load-bearing**”.

Many years ago a close friend taught us the concept of “**load-bearing**.” Sitting in our home one afternoon, he pointed to a beam that supported the ceiling. “Mike,” he remarked, “that beam is continually carrying the weight of the roof; the roof depends on it. That’s the kind of *relational* load-bearing that must exemplify followers of Jesus.”

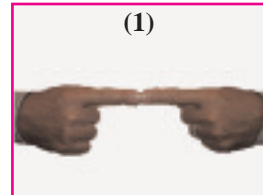


The Hebraic stream of those who first followed Jesus epitomized load-bearing. Paul’s commands flesh out what it means to bear the load for each other in our daily lives:

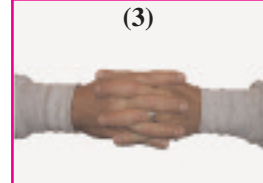
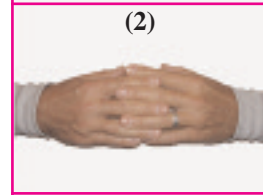
- “**Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ**” (Galatians 6:2).
- “**Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves. Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn**” (Romans 12:10,15).

- “**Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others**” (Philippians 2:4).

Picture each time you meet a new person as if *your* index finger was extending to touch *his* index finger (1). If your relationship remains shallow, each time you encounter each other will continue to be like one finger tip touching another.



(2) But, as your relationship deepens and grows more load-bearing, the fingers begin to slide down alongside each other until they are meshed together (3). Continued interpersonal support strengthens those relationships to form a sturdy bond of relational responsibility for each other. This is a way to view load-bearing within a home fellowship family.



Load-bearing provides **Christ-like support** for others as you trust Jesus together and rely on Him to transform the character of each of you. Just as the beam stretched across the ceiling supports both itself and the roof, so does your load-bearing extend loving support to others. The one you’re coming alongside feels cared for, and his dignity as our Father’s child is upheld as you serve him in His love.

You first learn to *bear the load* within your own home. Then you learn to bear the load of others as a natural part of your way of life in Christ. No one is born with a motive to serve others by bearing their load. This is an ongoing process all throughout your life, nurtured and deep-

ened by those who role-model loving service within your faith family.

Wise parents will instill the concept of load-bearing in their children by reinforcing opportunities to show their love through real-life means. But Christ-like load-bearing also grows as the life-long sanctification process continues.

The funnel diagram we introduced in a previous lesson shows that the willingness of your heart to bear the load for others matures the further down the funnel stem you go. As your personal discretion to do what you want decreases, your load-bearing grows as you become a servant to others.



Load-bearing is a vital part of your faith journey for two reasons:

You are helping those in your faith family grow in increasing Christ-likeness as you display His love through your actions.

By your loving response you are helping each one progress in their pilgrimage to heaven.

An important point to remember:

Those in the extended spiritual family of a home fellowship should never compensate for those who *aren't* bearing the load within their own home. Rather, as an outflow of your own relationship with Jesus, help families and individuals develop mutual concern for each other.

This is where mentoring and role modeling can help. By spending time in one another's homes you can share testimonies and offer practical counsel. Just

keep in mind that you aren't there to get people out of problems! Each person needs *his own trust in Jesus* to be growing so that he can find answers through following *Him*, not by copying you!

Keep in mind that the home fellowship needs to support *each home* as the *basic building block* of spiritual development. Each person needs to own his or her own dynamic relationship with Jesus.

Real load-bearing does not step in to compensate for what is lacking in others, nor does it displace them in their responsibilities.

Real load-bearing comes alongside another until the *way of the Lord* is formed in his or her life.

If you find you need some help in bearing your load, humble yourself to ask for help. Our Lord is creative in the ways He meets needs when you cry out to Him! But don't ever entertain **false expectation** (Lesson 32) that others know what's going on in your personal or home life. We say this because we've encountered so many who are plagued by **begrudging bitterness** when they falsely assumed others should have known they were in need.

We wrote earlier that, "**Success without a successor is failure.**" One of the results of Christ-like load-bearing is that it grooms successors in their walk with Jesus. But it takes humility to ask for help in those areas in which you're immature or deficient.

Sue and I became followers of Jesus when she was 29 and I was 31. Neither of us had any working familiarity with the Bible. When Sunday school classes or Bible studies bandied about terms like "major and minor prophets" or "exegesis of God's Word", we felt pretty foolish.

But asking questions and letting someone else help you is a key feature of the Christian faith. And, the humility to ask is also important!

All of us come to Christ from a wide variety of backgrounds. Each of us is also at a different point of spiritual maturity in our faith journey. That's why if you don't know how to walk righteously in certain aspects of your family life, you need to search God's Word and pray. Then ask others for help and guidance from what they've learned over the years.

For instance, if you're on unfamiliar turf in certain aspects of godly parenting, ask those whose interaction with their children is something you know you want for yourself. Most parents, especially those who are part of your spiritual family, will be glad to share ideas of how they're helping their children to better love, serve, and experience God. Ask!

An example: If you are frustrated by your toddler's incessant activity, ask for suggestions (and prayer!) from parents in your fellowship family who have learned from experience how to live in peaceful victory during that stage.

If your teenager suddenly seems uncommunicative or withdrawn, pray about this with him or her. Then seek counsel from those in your faith family who have gained insight through their own experiences. God really does want you to raise godly children and has provided resources who can minister truth and wisdom to you.

One mother in our home fellowship expressed her dismay over her thirteen-year-old daughter's occasional outbursts of tearful screaming. Another mom with a daughter the same age acknowledged that her daughter also had emotional flare-ups. This mother then shared what had worked in her own situation.

During tearful occasions with her daughter, she'd wrap her arms around the girl to affirm that she understood the inner turmoil and pain and frustration. She would then firmly insist that screaming was an unacceptable way to vent these emotions. (This woman and her husband had already established parameters for what was acceptable and had shared these as well as the consequences of disobedience with their children.)

When her daughter had calmed down, the mom would remind her of these boundaries, as well as the family goal of maintaining the home as a sanctuary of peace. In this way the girl was able to learn to take responsibility for her decision of whether or not to obey the family standards of behavior. She was also able to expand her awareness of the needs of others in her family for peace in the home, and to take her eyes off herself.

This type of sharing encourages others to bear one another's burdens and to give glory to God for His wisdom and compassion as he uses His people to meet needs.

Do you take personal responsibility to prayerfully seek God in time of need? Do you humbly and willingly ask others for help when you need it?

Ask those who know you for feedback.

Describe a few instances in which you bore the load for others.

2. The Relational Influence Of The Righteous Breeds Courage

“The fruit of righteousness will be peace; the effect of righteousness will be quietness and confidence forever”
(Isaiah 32:17).

“And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve the things that are excellent, in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ; having been filled with the fruit of righteousness which comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God (Philippians 1:9-11).

In Lesson 45 we discussed the importance of righteousness as a prerequisite for fellowship, especially as it results in answered prayer and testimonies to our Father’s glory. Our Hebraic forefathers understood clearly from the Older Testament that people influence each other for either good or bad.

Scripture abounds with counsel about the effect your choice of friends has on your own life:

- ***He who walks with the wise grows wise, but a companion of fools suffers harm*** (Proverbs 13:20).
- ***He who listens to a life-giving rebuke will be at home among the wise*** (Proverbs 15:31).
- ***A violent man entices his neighbor and leads him down a path that is not good*** (Proverbs 16:29).
- ***Do not make friends with a hot-tempered man, do not associate with one easily angered, or you may learn his ways and get yourself ensnared*** (Proverbs 22:24,25).

The old adage, “One bad apple spoils the whole barrel”, is undergirded by God’s Word.

Have you ever considered what the phrase, “***the fruit of righteousness***”, means? It’s the quiet confidence that enables you to live courageously for Jesus. The Bible makes this simple yet profound statement: “***The wicked man flees though no one pursues, but the righteous are as bold as a lion***” (Proverbs 28:1).

God’s Word teaches:

Righteous relationships spur believers on to greater love, courage and service for our Lord.

Sin-filled relationships deter His people from the valor and courage they need to fulfill His purposes through them.

Does this truth meet your heart?

The true line of demarcation in Christendom is between the repentant and unrepentant. Denominations or different religious practices are insignificant. The line of Kingdom relationship is between the righteous and the unrighteous.

The extended spiritual family within your home fellowship will choose one path or the other. Remember: Helping each other walk righteously is the deepest form of load-bearing. People attract like people to themselves.

- ***The righteous are drawn to the righteous because they savor our Lord’s presence in their midst.***
- ***The unrepentant hide out with the unrepentant so they can dabble in religion but cling to their sin.***

Biblical men of courage attracted one another. Jonathan had proved his courage for the Lord at Micmash (see 1

Samuel 14). The same courageous regard for God's honor was displayed by David against the arrogant Goliath (see 1 Samuel 17).



From the time they first met, these two valiant men were drawn to each other: *“And Jonathan had David reaffirm his oath out of love for him, because he loved him as he loved himself”* (1 Samuel 20:17).

We see later that Jonathan, at the risk of his own life, slipped away to encourage David when he was hiding from Saul at Horesh (1 Samuel 23). A true brother, *“he helped him find strength in God”* (v.16). That's real load-bearing! He was the kind of man who would have the loving courage to “jump on the hand grenade” for his friend.

Their mutual valor influenced each other and produced a wonderful devotion that was eulogized by David: *“I grieve for you, Jonathan my brother; you were very dear to me. Your love for me was wonderful, more wonderful than that of women”* (1 Samuel 1:26).

People who are courageous for God attract to themselves others of courage. The prophet Samuel describes the three *“men of valor”* (2 Samuel 23:8-12) who joined David's band. These three were joined by thirty other courageous men who were followed by hundreds more.

This progression of righteous attraction is a key factor for your own relational growth:

1 > 3 > 30 > hundreds
Each level is based on the
righteous courage of each person.

Your mutual fellowship in an extended spiritual family can serve a mighty

Vertical purpose: ***Righteousness produces boldness.*** Holy boldness attracts others who are focused on serving God with all their heart, soul, mind and strength.

Don't believe every person who assures you that he's “Christian” but lives no differently than those ensnared by the world. True fellowship grows only as the Spirit of Jesus works *in and through you both*, not as people choose the way of the world with a veneer of religious practice. The writer to the Hebrews offers solemn warning:

If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a terrifying expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God... But My righteous one will live by faith. And if he shrinks back, I will not be pleased with him (Hebrews 10:26,27,38).

Are you willing to love your brother or sister in your faith family enough to warn them if they're treading this dangerous path? Those who are more fearful of man than they are of God can spread that disquiet among others:

When you are about to go into battle, the priest shall come forward and address the army... ‘Do not be fainthearted or afraid; do not be terrified or give way to panic before them.’ Then the officers shall add, ‘Is any man afraid or fainthearted? Let him go home so that his brothers will not become disheartened too’ (Deuteronomy 20:2,3,8).

Our Father has called His children to ***collectively*** and ***cooperatively*** to do battle on the front line of spiritual warfare. Those who tolerate sin because they fear

the repercussion a confrontation might bring are choosing unrighteousness rather than obedient trust.

Because of the influence the fearful have on others, sin will continue to be overlooked. For the sake of everyone in your family of faith, both the fearful as well as the person continuing in sin need to be confronted and brought to repentance, or removed.

“Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness?” (2 Corinthians 6:14).

Those who are eldering in the extended spiritual family must take seriously the mandate to ***include*** or ***exclude*** from fellowship. The Bible has established criteria for God’s people to experience true fellowship with each other.

Sadly, some of those with whom you are in fellowship may depart their pilgrimage to salvation by choosing to stay in unrepentant sin. Our Father has revealed ways in which to identify these in the hope that they may be brought to repentance. You might recognize them through unanswered prayer, sickness, and even death, although we also know from Scripture that at times the wicked (or unrepentant) also seem to prosper.

Remember,

Choosing to live righteously out of loving, obedient trust and helping to maintain communal righteousness as spiritual family in Jesus is the deepest form of load-bearing.

Would you describe yourself as someone who lives righteously and boldly for Jesus? Yes or no? If yes, how has your courage been

tested and proved? If no, why are you choosing to live unrighteously or to “hide your light under a bushel”?

Do you believe that your close relationships in the faith reflect the depth of your walk in Jesus? If you do, look honestly at yourself and those to whom you are close. Are you living courageously for Jesus? Is He producing His fruit through each of you?

Describe the influence of the people in your fellowship family on you. Include specific individuals.

FELLOWSHIP IN HOMES
Extended Spiritual Family:

3. Cherish The Children

“See that you do not look down on one of these little ones. For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of My Father in heaven”
(Matthew 18:10).

We mentioned how important it is for fellowship families to welcome children whenever they get together. As we

noted in Lesson 45, your extended spiritual family should never treat children as “second-class citizens” of God’s Kingdom. Their angels see the face of God (see Matthew 18:10)!

Remember, Jesus admonished His disciples that if they hoped to even *enter* His Kingdom, they’d have to humble themselves and change their hearts. Then they might become as trusting and loving as the little ones who were drawn to Him:

I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 18:3,4).



You may not think that load-bearing has anything to do with how you treat children. However, men in particular can be revolutionized in their own view of themselves as a “child of God” if they spend meaningful time with the children in their extended spiritual family.

The trust and dependence that children have on their parents makes them effective “role models” for the nature of our Father’s children in His Kingdom. These little ones are “bearing your load” by giving you opportunity to help you trust as they do. And you bear their load as you uphold *their dignity* by welcoming them with love as Jesus did.

Jesus commended the vulnerable trust of children, which was such a contrast to the resistant disbelief even of those who witnessed His miracles.

At that time Jesus said, “I praise You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because You have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children” (Matthew 11:25).

With a humble innocence in regard to God, children are willing to repent when their wrong is revealed to them, for it pains them that they’ve pained their parents. On the other hand, adults who are too “sophisticated” to grieve over the hurt of their sin and repent, face a penalty as severe as that of ancient Sodom.

It’s sad how many adults consider children a potential nuisance in their gatherings. Jesus, however, rebuked His disciples when they tried to shoo away the little ones (see Matthew 19:13,14).

By welcoming children and encouraging them to share their insights and questions, you are reflecting the value you place on them. Even the elders permitted twelve-year-old Jesus a forum in the temple to share “*his understanding and his answers*” (see Luke 2:47).

One of the true measures of the character of Jesus in any adult is how they treat children.

Are you able to humbly entrust yourself to God the same way you see little children trust? Yes or no? If no, what are you lacking that the little ones have?

Describe your ongoing relationship with the children in your life and/or faith family. What is your perspective of children? And, how do you treat them?

One home fellowship to which we were committed as family consisted of six “family units” totaling twelve children, ages one to seventeen, and eleven adults. Generally when we gathered as a group, the adults and teens sat in a circle of chairs while the little ones played with interlocking blocks, tiny cars, coloring books and picture books in the middle of our circle. (A colorful quilt could mark the boundaries of your play area.) The toys were set aside just for home fellowship times as family, so no one had “ownership” over them. Even the older children sometimes kept their hands busy with plastic blocks while their ears were tuned in!

Often one of the little ones would crawl into an empty lap for a quiet story or take any available hand for a drink in the kitchen if discussion was going on. The adults became aunts and uncles to these children, and the teens were like big brothers and sisters. Even though few in the group had relatives living locally, relationships developed with family intimacy.

We’ve found that children who aren’t accustomed initially to quiet play gradually learn. When outright rebellion flares, the parent can accompany the child to a bedroom to handle the situation in the manner he or she chooses. But it’s the consistent relational interaction with the adults and the example set by peers and older children that help more active children settle in.

We also had no unrealistic expectations that a two-year-old will sit quietly for an

hour! We encourage parents to allow others to help with child care. This not only gives them a break but fosters trusting attachments between the children and adults in the fellowship family. Anyone can wipe a nose or hold a little hand on a walk-break!

Spontaneous midweek gatherings strengthen these relationships. Barbecues, nature hikes, slide shows, home videos, picnics, impromptu prayer times, game nights—all are expressions that say “We care, and we’re glad we’re trusting Jesus together!”

Not every person can make every get-together, and that’s all right. Each one knows that he or she is only a phone call away for praying, rejoicing and load-bearing. For single and divorced brothers and sisters, these relationships are especially vital as the love they share in the home fellowship family may represent the most comforting source of care that they’re experiencing. This is “Jesus with skin on” as they one-another in His Name!

We’ve found that it’s sometimes appropriate to break by gender into different areas of a home when we get together. Often this happens naturally without any deliberate attempt to divide by gender. Also, older children often enjoy participating in discussions with adults if they feel that they’ll be heard. And they can supervise the activity of the little ones as well while joining in discussion if they want to.

Rarely in your gathering together should discussion take place that is boring or inappropriate for young people. These are matters that can be handled privately during the week. Getting together as a fellowship family should be enjoyable for all ages, and this might mean the older children head outside for a break with the younger ones or for a snack in the kitchen. The keys are *flexibility* and *adaptability*. You’re at a family gathering, not a “church service” in a home. No agenda is wanted or needed!

If you meet in a home that isn't normally "childproof", move the untouchables out of reach. Parents can bring toys for their own children and confine their activities to a designated spot. This too is load-bearing.

Sometimes for variety and fun, fellowship families alternate adults or teens (both male and female) to supervise activities with the children for part of the time. The activity depends on the particular talents of the person who is leading and the age of the children. Examples of things our fellowship children enjoyed were songs, crafts, storytelling, and baking. While the meal was being prepared, Mike would often play outdoor games with the children and other adults. This too is load-bearing.

Further Tips From Personal Experience

Because impromptu contact is maintained during the week through personal visits or by phone, the children feel as though they are with family. Both adults and children learn to carry on conversations with all age groups.

Don't expect that your children have to be on their best behavior as though they're at some kind of performance or service! If they squabble with each other, first provide an opportunity for them to resolve it themselves (but not to the point of tantrums or violence!).

We encourage parents not to step in too early nor to feel embarrassed if their children's behavior is less than perfect. Remember, we *all* have a sin nature and it takes correction to help children resist theirs.

View disagreements among the children as opportunities for them to learn to yield rights and help one another. Sometimes the older children can intervene in creative ways that encourage their sense of responsibility too. This too is load-bearing—helping others resolve conflict.

Some parents, on the other hand, may seem oblivious to the disruptive behavior of their own children. This is a prime opportunity for the gray-haired mentors to take the parents aside to privately discuss appropriate "house rules" so that the apprehension levels of others can be diminished.

Parents whose children have already graduated from that stage may be able to offer helpful recommendations based on their own previous experiences. This too is load-bearing.

Finally, new additions to your fellowship family can be lovingly incorporated until the gatherings outgrow the homes or interpersonal connection is lost. Then it's time for the extended family to multiply so a sense of family in Jesus can be maintained and people who are new to following Jesus be included.

We found for a season that getting together Sunday morning at a rented gym brought many family fellowships together for joyful worship and prayer and an opportunity to reconnect. You're free to determine from our Lord how He wants you to bring your relationship with Him into union with others!

If you meet with others in homes, describe your time together. How are the children treated? Do you even have them with you? If they are, are the parents on pins and needles worried about their kids' behavior?

Have you gleaned any ideas that encourage you to change the nature of whenever you get together as fellowship family so that the children know they're welcomed?

poses and on our love for others draws us *outside ourselves*. In fact, being centered on our relationship with God and looking to the interests of others indicates that we are true followers of Jesus.

FELLOWSHIP IN HOMES
Extended Spiritual Family:

4. Love Is Demonstrated
Through Blessing Others

“Therefore, as the opportunity arises, let us do what is good to everyone, and especially to the family of those who are trustingly faithful”
 (Galatians 6:10,CJB).

We are all born egocentric. In other words, the world revolves around us. As we grow older we become aware of the wider world. But, that doesn't necessarily stop us from perceiving that we come first!

This self-focus is encouraged in our society by the influence of humanist-based Hellenism, which places man, including his desires and pleasures, as the center of his universe.



By contrast, for the followers of Jesus our world revolves around *our Lord*: loving and serving Him, trusting and pleasing Him, keeping His commands, and bringing our Father glory. Our focus on Him and His pur-

Look at the two diagrams bottom left. Which way do most of the arrows point in *your* life? Outward to our Father's glory and to service to others? Or, inward toward you? Describe yourself in light of what's most important to you.

A key expression of load-bearing is when you actively seek, plan and execute ways to bless others in your home and your home fellowship family. Looking to creatively bless those around you, particularly your spiritual family whom you personally know so well, demonstrates that your heart is filled with gratefulness for all that God has done *for you* and *in you* and *through you*.



It's within the fertile soil of loving relationships that you can truly *discern needs* that you can fill in accordance with our Lord's will.

A single mother in our fellowship family had experienced a painful divorce and felt emotionally and physically drained. Her nine-year-old daughter was very special to us, and each family in the fellowship spent extra time including her in family activities: sledding, hiking, walking the dog, playing at our homes. Both mother and child were able to regroup and press on with joy. Their fam-

ily in Jesus were able to respond as His heart and hands and feet so that He could be praised among us!

One means of blessing others is what you do **before** you come together in fellowship. If you recall, the early Church came together spiritually prepared to encounter Jesus. It's imperative that you prepare yourself and your family before you gather to worship so that you aren't a bunch of hungry little birds waiting for someone else to feed you spiritual seed!

*When you come together, **everyone** has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. All must be done for the **strengthening of the church** (1 Corinthians 14:26).*

Worshippers coming together should spiritually prepare themselves *in advance*, anticipating to participate as the Holy Spirit leads. You aren't going to a performance that someone else is putting on! You're gathering as family to bring "spiritual offerings" and testimonies that point everyone to His faithfulness.

Don't confuse this kind of offering with passing around a plate! Spiritual offerings might be a song that's touched you, a special picture a child has drawn for the gathering, a short passage that has touched someone's heart during the week. You're teaching your children in particular that bringing something to God as a gift from the heart is an integral expression of our gratitude to Him.

- **As your first step of preparation, make sure your family is free from unconfessed sin.**
- **During the week, ask the Holy Spirit to give each of you something to share that will edify the others.**

Before you come together in fellowship, remind yourself and your family that your goal is to experience Jesus and to spend time with people you dearly love. Before you get together with your fellowship family, your heart needs to be prepared to bless! This too is load-bearing.

How do you prepare before you get together for fellowship? In light of what we've just shared, is there anything that you need to change?

How does the idea of each one bringing a "spiritual offering" to edify the others strike you? What other ways come to mind to bless your gathered family in Jesus?

"Do not withhold good from those who deserve it, when it is in your power to act"
(Proverbs 3:27).

Picture a desperate, potentially embarrassing moment 2000 years ago as John reports in chapter 2 of his account. A young couple was celebrating their wedding—and then the wine ran out! The host couldn't just run out to a convenience store to buy more. So when Jesus was approached by His mother with the problem, He knew He had to do something about it: the answer was within His power!

Fulfilling the mandate of the Proverb, there was a need and it was within

His power to act. As you consider our Lord's pattern of identifying the need of those who came to Him and responding to that need *because He could*, think about all the healing and deliverance He did according to His Father's good purpose.

Then Jesus sets off spiritual fireworks! He tells us that we will do *even greater things* because He is with His Father (John 14:12). But why are so many followers of Jesus today not experiencing the "*greater things*" Jesus promised?

We believe it's because so many who have spent time in the institutionalized system have been seduced into spectatorship—watching others perform in formal services and believing that's what "church" is all about. Few have joyfully witnessed someone using the power of the Spirit in them to do what Jesus promises.

So, when many come alongside as spiritual family in their homes, they're clueless that He's given them the **power to act** for His Name's sake. Because they've never depended on the Spirit to work through them according to His gifting and love, they have no idea what walking together in the Spirit looks like.

I [Mike] have walked in a prophetic gifting for over 29 years. During this same period Sue has been empowered with the gifts of exhortation and faith. I see my role as helping to keep people out of trouble with God by speaking forth His Word to them. He's also enabled me to convey specific truths that followers of Jesus need for guidance.

When Sue and I come together in load-bearing relationship with others, I habitually ask our Lord, "Is there any hidden sin in these people I care about?" If he reveals an individual and the nature of a hidden sin, I talk with the person privately. A certain holy

fear of our Lord mingles with wonderful love for His faithfulness to want them to walk unsullied in His power.

As it happens, our Father often gives me a specific *rhema* to encourage individuals or to guide them on the path of His choosing.

Several years ago a woman who was extended spiritual family with us experienced a number of miscarriages which had devastated her. One Saturday morning she and her husband were coming to visit. Before they arrived I was working on a leak under the sink. I heard the Lord say, "As soon as Nancy arrives, tell her she's going to have a baby."

As she and her husband walked in I still had my head under the sink. I called out to her to let her know what the Holy Spirit had told me. She screamed and cried for joy! "I've had so many disappointments that I asked our Lord on the way here that if I was to have a baby, would He tell you first!"

This too is load-bearing.

I [Sue] have found how often our Lord uses me a vessel to pour out encouragement and words of exhortation to help other women trust in His faithfulness.

Sometimes in the middle of a conversation He'll give me a Scriptural truth to apply, or a testimony of something I've gone through. How many times that turns out to be just the word she needed to hear for her trust to be rekindled and her hope renewed! This too is load-bearing.

How has God gifted you to respond when it is within your power to act? How have you followed the Spirit's prompting to help others?

“But just as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in your love for us—see that you also excel in the grace of giving.. Our desire is not that others might be relieved while you are hard pressed, but that there might be equality” (2 Corinthians 8:7,13).

There is a close link between *caring* for someone and *sharing* what you have with that person when there’s a need. Jesus recognized that people do have material needs for which they have to work to provide. A certain parable focuses on a landowner who has hired workers all throughout the day for his vineyard. The owner has upheld the dignity of each worker by giving him a job rather than charity. He has also recognized that each man’s needs are similar even if the hours worked aren’t:

I want to give the man who was hired last the same as I gave you. Don’t I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous? (Matthew 20: 14,15).

If you share the precious friendship of extended spiritual family, are you aware of any material needs your brothers and sisters might have? If there are needs, ask yourself:

- **What material blessing do those in need receive from me?**
- **Am I a gracious giver to those whom I profess are my spiritual family?**
- **Does my giving reflect my appreciation for all that my Father has given me?**
- **When I do meet a need, could the recipient feel embarrassed because I broadcast my act?**

Keep in mind that *God* is the Provider of all we need (Acts 14:17, 1 Timothy 6:17). Therefore everything which He has entrusted to your care should be disseminated and used according to *His good purpose*. The early Church interpreted their responsibility to meet one another’s needs by sharing all their worldly goods (see Acts 4:32).

James reiterated the need to *take ownership* of the needs of those who are your family in Jesus. Note that the needy he describes are desperate, lacking even the most basic provision. If your heart truly aligns with that of our Father, you’ll embrace that person as the brother or sister they are and uphold their dignity as you meet those needs.

Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, ‘Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed,’ but **does nothing about his physical needs**, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not **accompanied by action**, is dead (James 2:15-17).

The apostle’s command to evidence your talk with a *responsive walk* snuffs out any Hellenist dualism that ignores the needs of the physical realm but spiritualizes through lofty words. There’s not even a flicker of life to that hardness of heart. That faith is DEAD.

The Holy Spirit often prompts His people to meet a *specific need* of a brother or sister in Jesus’ family. How often we’ve been the recipients of the exact dollar amount we needed at a particular time! For example:

We had no sooner arrived at our destination a thousand miles from home when the

car radiator failed. We had no funds for this unexpected glitch, but a family friend agreed to repair it at cost. The following day two checks arrived totaling the whole amount of the repair. Neither check donor knew of our specific need but had responded to the urging of the Holy Spirit to send help. Boy! Did we have a testimony for our faith community!

The Hebrew Scriptures overflow with commands to meet the needs of one another out of obedient trust in the *God Who Provides* (see Genesis 22:8). Good deeds of charity were a hallmark of Hebraic daily life.

The “*righteousness [that] delivers from death*” (see Proverbs 10:2, 11:4) was no abstract concept but a deliberate donation of material goods to meet real needs. The Hebrew word for righteousness means “*acts of right or justice.*” That translates into compassionate benevolence.

It isn’t enough before our Lord to parcel out a little to someone so that you’ll have more for extras yourself. The help you measure out to meet the needs of others will be poured out to you as a blessing from all your labor. It really is a heart issue; is yours bountiful or tight?

Give generously to him and do so without a grudging heart; then because of this the Lord your God will bless you in all your work and in everything you put your hand to. There will always be poor people in the land. Therefore I command you to be openhanded toward your brothers and toward the poor and needy in your land (Deuteronomy 15:10,11).

This too is load-bearing.

From a Hebraic standpoint, *to do what was right* constituted your true worship of

God. To *love God* was to love your fellow man in a way that *met his needs*. Jesus warns us to keep everything we have in open hands. We are *stewards* of what He’s given us here on earth, not owners:

‘The eye is the lamp of the body.’ So if you have a ‘good eye’ [if you are generous] your whole body will be full of light; but if you have an ‘evil eye’ [if you are stingy] your whole body will be full of darkness. If, then, the light in you is darkness, how great is that darkness! (Matthew 6:22,23).

Would those who know you well say you have a “good eye” or an “evil eye”? How do you demonstrate this?

Describe a time when you were so anxious about your finances that you held onto what you had rather than meeting the true need of a brother. How did you feel afterward?

“And He has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother”
(1 John 4:21).

The word “love” is bandied about so casually in this culture: “I love dogs”, “I love chocolate.” Yet this sort of “love” costs you nothing personally nor does it call for a response.

In contrast, the Hebraic view of love demands a personal sacrifice because

there is an *inherent value* placed on the one who is loved. The essence of the love to which Jesus refers lays not in what you *say* about love but in what you *do* about it.

From the framework that if you love *His way* you'll respond with action, Jesus could link the final judgment with "*whatever you **did** for one of the least of these*" (see Matthew 25:40).

The hypocrisy which He so soundly condemned in the Pharisees is embodied by *living* in a manner that refutes your words: "*Even a child is known by his **actions**, by whether his **conduct** is pure and right*" (Proverbs 20:11).

There is no shortage of religious opinion or theological discussion that goes no further than the mouth of the speaker or the ears of the listener. But Paul exhorted Philemon to bypass the way of the world in which talk is cheap so that he would *live out* true fellowship:

*I pray that the **fellowship of your faith may become effective** [Greek: "actively engaged"] through the knowledge of every good thing which is in you for Christ's sake. For I have come to have much joy and comfort **in your love**, because the hearts of the saints have been **refreshed through you**, brother (vv. 6,7, NAS).*

The *living witness* of your faith has feet to it! When you grasp through the Spirit how much God has *shown His love for you* by sending His Son to pay the death penalty you deserve, you want to share that treasure of love by pouring it onto others.

As those you encounter see more of **Christ's love in action** through you, they'll begin to attribute more to *Him working in you* and less to you as a "good person"—the world's response to kind-

ness. Through the changes He makes in *you*, the recipients of your love's action will "*see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven*" (Matthew 5:16).

James exhorts his family in Jesus to demonstrate that the trust they have is real through the work that flows out from it (see 2:18). He's not talking about just putting a check in the mail and then feeling good about it (though sharing your resources *is* one of the ways the Spirit works).

The outworking of a loving faith takes *time*, the commodity people seem to treasure most but have at their discretion the least. The choices you make about the use of your daily twenty-four hours can seem staggering unless you ask yourself, "*What would Jesus do?*"—then abide by the answer the Holy Spirit reveals. This too is load-bearing.

Make sure you don't caught up in *doing* "out there" at the expense of those who should be your relational priority. We know too many men in particular who spend their evenings and weekends consumed with volunteer activities that make them feel good about themselves but are shortchanging the ones who should be first on the receiving end of their energy.

Aside from your responsibilities to your family, strengthen and refresh those with whom you are growing together as family in Jesus. Again, only intimate, load-bearing relationships will spur you on to actively expend your life for Jesus's sake. Your acts of kindness in no way earn you salvation. They are the outpouring of Spirit-driven love that *evidences* the work of God in you.

As "*living stones*" (see 1 Peter 2:5) in God's spiritual house, you are a reflection of Christ in you. How you *choose to live* will stand out in a culture that is self-

seeking and bent on pursuing fleshly gratification:

Live such good lives among the pagans that even though they now speak against you as evil-doers, they will, as a result of seeing your good actions, give glory to God on the Day of His coming (1 Peter 2:12).

The Scripture list that translates love into action could go on... We were reminded of Jesus’s teaching about the Samaritan when He was asked, “Who is my neighbor?” (see Luke 10:29-37). In essence, He answered that our neighbors are all those for whom, through the love of Jesus, we reach out to *bear their load*.

Would you consider yourself *active* in revealing Jesus’s kindness and concern for other people? Describe how your faith is seen by others through what you do.

“Share with God’s people who are in need. Practice hospitality” (Romans 12:13).

While we were in Israel some Jewish followers of Jesus asked us just before we returned to the United States:

“Why do American Christians only get together with others over an activity like a Bible study? Can’t you just invite someone into your home because you care for them?”

You can imagine how deeply we were affected by their words—because they were so true! We’ve found few in the faith who even consider having others

in their home just to affirm them as people.

Just look at where your generosity might lead when it’s done with a heart that has no expectation that your kindness will be reciprocated: **“Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it”** (Hebrews 13:2).



Followers of Jesus in the Hebraic early Church understood that hospitality was as important among their brothers and sisters in Jesus as it was among their relatives. That’s why those who had a heart to serve as leaders were exhorted to be hospitable and open their homes for relational access as another tangible demonstration of love-based load-bearing (see Timothy 3:2, Titus 1:8).

Having others in your home is one of the most loving acts you can do to uphold their dignity and convey a warm sense of belonging.

Biblical hospitality is an entirely different phenomenon than what we in the United States regard as “inviting people over.” Americans may love to entertain, but our gatherings are more oriented to the **activity** we do (barbecuing, playing cards, watching a sports event) rather than the opportunity to deepen a relationship.

For instance, many Hellenized religious programs involving a home setting use a Bible study or some prescribed curriculum as the focal point for gathering. The reason for getting together is the **activity**, not the interconnectedness of the people themselves.

We need to regain the relational *connection* of our Hebraic ancestors:

To purposely invite others into our homes to nourish relationships.

Peter instructs us, “*Offer hospitality to one another*” (1 Peter 4:9). Certainly the weekly joyous celebration of the Sabbath is an avenue for reunion if you’re celebrating Jesus *as family*. But other spontaneous get-togethers offer insight into the desire for committed love and depth of relationship.

If your extended spiritual family isn’t engaging in spontaneous contact in one form or another during the week, your fellowship gathering will become nothing more than a “church service” in someone’s house.

I [Mike] used to meet with the men of our home fellowship family one morning a week at 5:00 for breakfast. (We decided on the early morning so we wouldn’t rob time from our families.) Here we could discuss the various problems we were facing and share insights with each other. It was a special time we all looked forward to. We normally got together on Friday so we could catch up on sleep over the weekend.

In another family fellowship we got together for a potluck every Wednesday with anyone who could make it. Our goal was to eat together and share whatever else the Lord wanted to do. No two Wednesday evenings were ever the same. Whatever our Lord wanted to do in our midst we were open to!

Hebraic hospitality is also impromptu so that family in Jesus feel free to drop in without prior arrangement. (And open honesty as family allows you the freedom to let them know if now isn’t a good time for a visit!)

Being open to unplanned “intrusion” also makes it easy for you to turn to one another in time of need. Our culture is so used to scheduling every activity that it’s that much more difficult to spontaneously turn to other believers when problems arise.

It’s ironic how natural it was for us as children to stop by our friends’ homes. Somehow cultural entrapments take over until what once seemed so natural during youth is later perceived as an inconvenience when we “mature.”

If you examine the levels of relationship you have with the various people with whom you fellowship, you might be shocked to discover how shallow so many of them are. The following two questions may help you discern the depth of your relational ties. We asked them on several occasions both at the retreat center and during our Hebraic seminars.

Name three people in your faith community to whom you would turn in time of deep trouble in your life.

Name three people in your faith community you would ask to do an activity.

So often when we compared and analyzed the results, the responses verified how shallow and uncommitted the rela-

tionships were within those faith communities. Few could come up with three names for each category.

Of those who had listed six names, we investigated further. Many admitted they probably wouldn't really contact some of those people; they had just seemed like folks who would be understanding or fun. In light of this data, Christian relationships which "carry each other's burdens" are relatively few.

Another indicator for concern: When those who serve as leaders barely show up in the responses, especially among those a person would turn to in time of need, there is a grievous problem. A man can't lead if there is no one perceiving he's leading!

On the other hand, Paul commanded Titus to appoint as elders the older men to whom the new Cretan converts were *already looking as leaders* (see Titus 1:5).

The lives of true load-bearers are intricately intertwined with others in their fellowship family. They "*rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn*" (Romans 12:15). They pray and fast with each other to perceive God's answers to the painful or confusing situations that afflict them.

They also have a responsive heart that doesn't flinch at godly admonishment: "*Faithful are the wounds of a friend*" (Proverbs 27:6). The wounds that are motivated by love call for deep commitment and compassion born out of times of shared sorrow and joy. This too is load-bearing.

Recommended Further Reading

- Hebraic Article: *He Has Showed You*
- To test yourself on how you are doing in blessing others, see our Teaching E-mail: *18. Our Gift To You (December 13, 2005)*.
- Hebraic Article: *Fellowship in Homes—The Hebraic Model*
- Lifebyte 22: *Obedient Trust versus Reason*
- December 1999 Newsletter: *Millennium Living*
- November 2000 Newsletter: *Clusters of Grapes for God's Glory*
- October-November 2003 Newsletter: *Love the Lord Your God with All...*
- March-April 2004 Newsletter: *Grandpa, The Reformation Wasn't the Restoration*