

DINING WITH GOD

HOW WE EXPERIENCE A PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

True fellowship with the only true and living God and with one another produces the kind of joy in our lives that becomes living evidence for His existence (1 John 1:1-4).

Notes and Outline

By

David E. Rembert

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CHAPTER ONE

THE GREATEST CALL

1 Corinthians 1:9

“God is faithful, through whom you were called into fellowship with His Son. Jesus Christ our Lord.”

I have often talked to people about having a personal relationship with the only true and living God. That is because the Bible, God’s Word, makes it very clear: God wants all of us to have a personal relationship with Him. We will see that in a moment.

The Bible also makes it clear that we enter into that personal relationship with God the moment we put our trust in Jesus Christ as our Savior and Lord. The very moment we believe, *“...that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures...”* (1 Corinthians 15:3-4) a personal relationship begins between us and God. As we are told in 1 John 4:15, *“Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God.”* Jesus said in John 14:23, *“If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him.”* Every follower of Jesus Christ knows from experience that Christ is in us and we are in Christ and together we are in the Father and the Father is in us. Every man, woman and child has a personal relationship with God the moment they put their faith in Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord.

Something amazing happens when we enter into a personal relationship with the only true and living God. God produces joy in our lives. As the apostle John stated, *“...what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ. These things we write, so that our joy may be made complete”* (1 John 1:3-4). The apostle Paul tells us, in Philippians 4:4, *“Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say rejoice!”* Our lives are to show great joy as we fellowship God the Father, with Jesus Christ and with one another.

Before I became a follower of Jesus Christ, I attended a Bible study next door to where I lived. The fellowship that those Christians had with God and with one another produced a genuine joy in their lives. It was one of the things that drew me to faith in Jesus Christ. For me, their joy became living evidence for God’s existence. I wanted that kind of joy in my life. I trust, you do as well. The question is: How do we develop and grow in that kind of relationship with God?

The kind of relationship that produces a genuine joy in our lives that becomes living evidence for God's existence?

This series of notes and outlines titled "*Dining With God*" addresses that question as we begin by looking at "*The Greatest Call*" ever offered to the human race.

THE CALL

In **Revelation 3:14-22**, Jesus sent a message to one of the first century churches, the church located in the city of Laodicea. In **verse 20**, He said, "***Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me.***" There are several observations we need to make regarding this verse that have application for us today.

Jesus sent a message to a church, a congregation of believers, who were so materialistic, self-reliant, and so wrapped up with themselves they gave no thought to Jesus. Jesus wanted to sit down and fellowship with them in the Spirit and they left Him outside knocking at the door.

Jesus sent a message to a church that was financially solvent, but spiritually bankrupt. They had physical eyes that were blinded to spiritual truth. Their hearts were full of love for themselves, not full of love for Jesus. By all indications, when they gathered for fellowship, Jesus was not invited. They left Jesus outside knocking at the door.

We need to understand something. What happened within the church at Laodicea first happened in the hearts of those individuals attending the church. So it is today. What happened to the people within the church at Laodicea can happen to anyone in any church today. We can become complacent, lukewarm in our faith, worldly in our thinking and spiritually bankrupt. As individuals within the church, we must make a choice. We either choose to love the world or we choose to love Jesus, the choice is ours. We cannot do both.

Our Lord's desire is clear, Jesus stands at the door and knocks desiring to have fellowship with His bride, the church. We learn several things about the kind of fellowship our Lord desires from **Revelation 3:20**:

- First, we see His desire for fellowship. He wants to have a personal relationship with His people. He wants to open up His life to us and He wants us to open up our lives to Him.
- Second, fellowship is not forced. Remember, Jesus in His resurrected body could walk through walls (**John 20:26**), but he never forces Himself into the heart of anyone. We must desire to fellowship with Him as much as He does with us.
- Third, He wants to dine with His people. He gives us a beautiful picture of the kind of fellowship He desires. It is not a pop it in the microwave kind of dinner and fellowship. It is not a "*meet you at the vending machine*" kind of lunch and fellowship. Jesus wants to sit down and not be hurried. It is more like the time when Jesus made breakfast for His disciples in **John 21:9-12**. Jesus made a charcoal fire, put some fish on it and some bread, and they sat and ate and had fellowship. So often when we sit with Jesus in fellowship and prayer we are pressured by the events of the day. We are always in a rush to go somewhere or to do something. Jesus does not want to be hurried.
- Fourth, fellowship with God is two way. He will fellowship with us and we will fellowship with Him.

All of this should start raising questions in your own mind. Questions like: How do I experience this personal fellowship with Jesus and the Father? How do I, in a practical way, dine with the only true and living God? How do I have fellowship with someone I can't see or touch? This series will get you there.

The greatest call upon our lives is the call to fellowship with the Jesus. In **1 Corinthians 1:9**, we are told, *“God is faithful, through whom you were called into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.”* In the original manuscripts the Greek word translated into the English language as *“fellowship”* is the word *“koinōnia.”* The word is also translated *“sharing,” “participation,”* and *“contribution.”* In some Bibles it is translated as *“communion.”* The basic idea is that we are called by the Father to come together with Jesus and share with Jesus. We are to talk with Him about common things. We commune with Jesus around the things that we value together. Why does God call us into fellowship with His Son? It is so our joy will be full.

THE JOY

As we have already seen, in **1 John 1:3-4** the apostle John wrote, *“...what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ. These things we write, so that our joy may be made complete.”* For me, one of the greatest joys in my life is to sit with people and listen as they share what Jesus is doing in their lives. Another joy is to talk with the Lord about what He is doing in my life and how He is using me or might use me for His glory.

The Lord and I had a routine during the years when I was a Senior Pastor. We always had a beautiful time of fellowship together as He led me in preparing the Sunday morning messages. The Sunday before Christmas and on Christmas Eve in 2007 was no different. As I prepared the messages I was in fellowship with Jesus. Knowing the direction the messages were going, I was talking to the Lord about the people who might be in attendance. I was praying for those who needed to know Him personally and who needed to have their sins forgiven. I thanked Him for what He was doing and asked if He would allow me to share the Good News about Jesus in a clear and powerful way. I asked Him to bring those whose hearts were ready to receive Jesus as their personal Savior and Lord. He did exactly that. A young woman came to our Christmas Eve service for the first time. After the service she came up to me and said, *“I have never heard anyone explain so clearly how Jesus came to take away our sins and how to have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. I want that relationship.”* I shared with her in more detail the gospel message, as clearly as I could. She responded, saying, *“I want my sins forgiven. I believe in Jesus as my Savior and Lord. I want to enter into eternal fellowship with Him.”* While standing on the steps leading into the church, with people walking by wishing each other a Merry Christmas, this young woman prayed and asked Jesus to forgive her sins and to come into her life. What a Christmas present for her, for me and for Jesus. She walked away rejoicing in the Lord. My heart was overflowing with joy. As I drove home, I entered into a joyful time of fellowship with Jesus. I was praising and thanking Him for His grace and for His gift of salvation. I was praising and thanking Him for the forgiveness of sin that He offers and for the eternal life we have with Him. I was praising and thanking Him for the personal relationship and fellowship we can have with Him.

On that Christmas morning, around 2:30 AM, I did not hear slay bells ringing, but rather I sensed the Spirit's prompting. I awoke with my heart still filled with Joy and for the next hour I kept getting out of bed to jot down ideas the Lord was giving me for a new series of messages. That morning this series titled "*Dining with God*" was outlined. With my heart full of joy I thanked the Lord for our early morning time of fellowship and I then went back to sleep.

Fellowship with the Lord can happen at any time. Some times it is me generating the fellowship as I pray and spend time in God's Word. Sometimes it is me generating the fellowship as I drive in the car, as I sit quietly in my home and as I walk along the way. Sometime it is the Lord by His Holy Spirit generating the fellowship at 2:30 in the morning. What a joy!

THE WALK

Okay, how do we maintain the right heart for fellowship? Jesus is at the door of our heart knocking and we let Him in. Now, how do we keep that door open, so He does not need to knock? The answer: It is the way we walk. In **1 John 1:5-7** the apostle John said, "***This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all. If we say that we fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth; but if we walk in the light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.***" If we want to be in fellowship with Jesus and the Father, then we must walk in the Light as He is in the Light.

What does walking in the light mean and how do we do it? **Ephesians 5:7-10** sheds more light on this. It says, "***Therefore do not be partakers with them (see verses 1-6); for you were formerly darkness, but now you are light in the Lord; walk as children of Light (for the fruit of the Light consists in all goodness and righteousness and truth), trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord.***" Walking in the Light means doing good and acting rightly according to God's Word just as Jesus would do if He were here right now. Walking in the Light means nothing is hidden. It means we are not doing anything we wouldn't want others to see. Walking in the Light means we have no ulterior motives, our hearts are right before God and man. When we walk in the Light as He is in the Light, then the door of fellowship is wide open with the only true and living God. Understanding all of that, how do we go about having fellowship with Jesus and the Father? Where do we start? What do we do?

 CHAPTER TWO

ENJOY THE MAIN COURSE

Psalm 119:103

“How sweet are Your words to my taste! Yes, sweeter than honey to my mouth!”

The purpose of this series is to help us develop and grow in a personal relationship with Jesus and the Father. Part of that growth takes place when we enter into fellowship with Jesus. Every person who has put their faith in Jesus as their personal Savior and Lord has received a call to fellowship with the only true and living God. We are told in **1 Corinthians 1:9**, *“God is faithful, through whom you were called into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.”* When you stop and think about it – that is awesome! The eternal infinite God of the universe wants you and me to fellowship with His Son, the risen Christ. This is where we start in our personal relationship Jesus and the Father.

We have already seen that if we want to maintain that fellowship, flowing freely between us and the Lord and between the Lord and us, we must walk in the Light as He is in the Light. As we are told in **1 John 1:5**, *“...if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another...”* That is great, but how do we go about it? Where do we start? What do we do?

THE MAIN COURSE

When we dine with God we are to start with the main course. In **Matthew 4:4**, Jesus quoted a statement that came from **Deuteronomy 8:3**. It is part of what God wants passed down from one generation to the next. Jesus said, *“It is written, ‘Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every Word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.’”* As we enter into this beautiful time of fellowship with the only true and living God we do so by enjoying the main course, which is the Word of God. We are to fellowship with God around His Word.

There was a time in my life when I read the Bible every day as part of my daily routine. I saw it as part of my obligation as a Christian. I saw it as part of growing in my faith as a Christian, which was correct. However, I discovered something that was very unsettling. Reading my Bible was at the top of my daily list of things to do. Sounds good, right? Unfortunately, I was just going through the motions. I was just reading the Bible so I could check it off of my things to do list. I lost my passion for God’s Word. It was not having the impact on my life that it used to

have. There were no changes taking place in my life. At the time, I was even teaching Bible studies. I was spending twenty hours a week in preparation to teach three different Bible studies during the week while working 40-60 hours a week at my secular job. However, all I was doing was teaching what the commentaries were saying. I was not teaching from a changed life that was affected by the Word of God. At the time, I thought I was doing pretty well. I was even using personal examples from my life to illustrate how God's Word changes our lives. Here was the unsettling part. One day my wife said to me, *"I notice that you keep using the same old personal illustrations. Is God doing anything new in your life?"* WOW! Thank God for a godly wife who loved her husband enough to challenge his walk with Jesus and his personal fellowship with Him.

I was not really feasting on the Word of God. I was not enjoying the main course. I was not internalizing God's Word in a way that allowed the Holy Spirit to change my life. I was not letting the Word of God nourish me spiritually. I was not dining with the only true and living God. I was not enjoying the beautiful fellowship He so desired for me to have with Him. I was eating and running. I was in the spiritual fast food line. I would read the Bible out of obligation, check it off my things to do list and move on to everything else that was pressing on my time. As a result I became stagnant in my faith and in my walk with Jesus, and my fellowship with Him suffered.

We can all get there. So what do we do about it? What can we do to make sure we enjoy the main course in our time of fellowship with God? Here is what I did. Please read carefully. Don't stop. Read on or you may think I am teaching heresy. I stopped reading the Word of God! Yes, that is correct. Let this sink into your heart. It can change your life. Instead of reading the Word of God I began chewing on the Word of God. What do I mean by that? I began meditating on God's Word allowing His Holy Spirit to change my life from the inside out.

A PERSONAL REALITY

In **Psalm 119:148** the Psalmist wrote these words, *"My eyes anticipate the night watches, that I may meditate on Your Word."* We are told that we should chew our food 30-40 times before swallowing. It helps our bodies digest the food better. It also helps us to enjoy the flavor. The same is true with spiritual food, God's Word. God wants us to get out of the fast spiritual food line and sit down with Him and enjoy the main course. Chew on it.

When we read the Bible we should slow down and find one verse for the day that we can chew on, meditate on and ponder throughout the day. Meditation is simply the process of going over and over a particular verse in the Bible to find spiritual nourishment. I find it helpful to write the verse on a 3x5 card. Then jot down insights that I have regarding that verse on the opposite side of the card, insights that I can apply to my own life with God's help. Then, I talk to God about those insights.

For example: **Psalm 119:148** says, *"My eyes anticipate the night watches..."* That tells me that I should look forward to a quiet time when I can ponder God's Word. It says, *"My eyes..."* That tells me the time I spend with God in His Word should be my personal time away from other people and distractions. I might take that statement to the Lord in prayer and say, *"Lord, please help me find a place and a time where I can be alone with You. Help me find a place that is away from distractions, a quiet place where I can enjoy our time together."* The verse also

says, “...*that I may meditate on Your Word.*” That tells me the Lord wants me to put down the other books and pick up the Bible. I might again turn that into a prayer saying something like, “*Father, help me to put down all the other things that I am reading or watching. Help me to focus on You and Your Word. Take Your Word, Father, and minister to my life. Bring me encouragement, help me see You in a more powerful way. Let me hear the teaching of Your Spirit as I meditate on Your Word.*” My point is this, let God speak to your heart. Slow down. Find a quiet place and enjoy the main course. We are to fellowship with God around His Word.

A PERSONAL DESIRE

The Psalmist wrote in **Psalm 119:103**, “*How sweet are Your words to my taste! Yes, sweeter than honey to my mouth!*” The Lord wants us to get to that place where His Word is sweet. He wants His Word to satisfy our spiritual sweet tooth. He wants us to crave His Word more than any other word, spoken or written.

When I was aboard ship in the Coast Guard we had a cook that prepared fresh baked cinnamon rolls for the night watch every night at midnight. The aroma of those cinnamon rolls filled the ship. There is nothing better than cinnamon rolls fresh out of the oven. There were about four to eight members of the crew who were part the night watch. They were the ones for whom the cinnamon roles were baked. However, there were thirty to forty members of the crew that showed up in the ship’s galley at midnight all claiming to be night-watchmen. Many aboard ship looked forward to that midnight snack. They had a craving for cinnamon roles.

We are to have that kind of craving for the Word of God. The apostle Peter tells us, in **1 Peter 2:2-3**, “...*like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation, if you have tasted the kindness of the Lord.*” We are to have a craving for the Word of God. It is to be sweet to our taste. If we have “*tasted the kindness of the Lord*” (His love, grace and call into fellowship with His Son), then we should be like a new born baby desiring pure milk – the pure milk of God’s Word. We should have a craving for God’s Word like those sailors at midnight longing for a cinnamon role.

GOD’S INTENDED RESULT

Why does God desire us to enjoy the main course, His Word, as part of our fellowship with Him? I believe the answer is found in **Isaiah 55:10-11**. It says, “*For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there without watering the earth and making it bear and sprout, and furnishing seed to the sower and bread to the eater; so shall My word be which goes forth from My mouth; it shall not return to Me empty, without accomplishing what I desire, and without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it.*” God wants to minister to us and encourage us. He wants to help us grow in our relationship with Him and our walk with Him through His Word. God wants to nourish us spiritually through His Word. He wants to change us from the inside out with His Word.

You have probably heard the saying, “*You are what you eat.*” Well, that is not only true physically but also spiritually. God wants us to enjoy the main course of His Word as we fellow-

ship with Him so we become more like Jesus. He wants us to chew on it (meditate on it) and internalize it, so He can help us grow in our relationship with Him.

Psalm 1:3 tells us that the one who meditates on God's Word, ***"He will be like a tree firmly planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in its season and its leaf does not wither; and in whatever he does he prospers."*** God wants to help us grow in our personal relationship with Him by us enjoying the main course – the Word of God.

CHAPTER THREE

MAKE SURE YOU EAT YOUR PEAS AND LIMA BEANS

2 Timothy 3:16

“All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness...”

There is something that is very important to know as we fellowship with God around the main course – His Word. Something we need to expect and accept. God wants us to eat our peas and lima beans.

What do I mean by that statement? The idea is this: As we dine with God around His Word we need to let the Holy Spirit teach us how to deal with the realities of life. We need to let Him convict us of wrong behavior and redirect our lives as necessary. We need to allow Him to change and develop our character. We need to let Him change our attitudes, and even our perspective on life.

There are teachings in the Bible that get very personal. The Bible reveals things in our lives and about our lives that we sometimes don't want to hear or deal with, even though we know we should. It is like eating those things we know are good for us, but we really don't like – for me it is peas and lima beans.

As a young boy my parents made me clean my plate at every meal before I could leave the table. Now, I liked my Mom's cooking, even most vegetables. However, I had a hard time eating peas and lima beans. I could get the peas down if I ate them one by one and swallowed them whole. However, the lima beans made me gag to the point of almost upchucking my entire meal.

One day I came up with what I thought was a brilliant plan. I took my napkin and built a tent. When my parents were not looking I would take a spoon full of lima beans and put them inside the tent. When they saw that my plate was empty they said good job, you're excused. The problem was I did not think that plan through very well. Someone was going to clean off the table and someone was going to pick up the napkin shaped into a tent and discover my deposit of lima beans. I thought I had gotten away with something, but I really didn't. I got caught and found myself back at the table, all alone, eating my lima beans.

This is sometimes how we approach God. We may have a great time in fellowship with Him around His Word, but we try to hide the things we don't want Him to see or the things we don't want to deal with.

KNOW WHO YOU ARE DINNING WITH

I think it is important for us to keep in mind who we are dining with. Perhaps the best way we can learn this is from king David in the Old Testament. David had and enjoyed his time of fellowship with the only true and living God. We see that illustrated through the songs David wrote and sang to the Lord, many of which are documented in the book of Psalms.

In **Psalm 139:1-4**, as David was enjoying his time of fellowship with God, he said this, ***“O LORD, You have searched me and known me. You know when I sit down and when I rise up; You understand my thought from afar. You scrutinize my path and my lying down, and are intimately acquainted with all my ways. Even before there is a word on my tongue, behold, O LORD, You know it all.”*** The only true and living God whom we love, serve and fellowship with knows everything there is to know about you and me. Nothing is hidden from His sight. In **Hebrews 4:13** we are told, ***“And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do.”*** God knows our thoughts before they are put into words. He knows our joys and He knows when our heart aches. He knows the motivation behind everything we do. Nothing is hidden from the One we fellowship with and dine with.

David, in his time of fellowship with God, expressed back to God these words in **Psalm 139:17-18**, ***“How precious also are Your thoughts to me, O God! How vast is the sum of them! If I should count them, they would outnumber the sand. When I awake, I am still with You.”*** Please don't miss this. God's thoughts towards you and me are precious.

When we put our faith in Christ as our Savior and Lord we are adopted into God's eternal family. Therefore, we can call Him Abba Father, or Daddy. As a result of that personal relationship Jesus said He calls us friends (**John 15:15**), He calls us brothers and sister (**Matthew 12:46-50**) and He calls us His bride (**Revelation 19:7, 21:2 and 21:9**). When we put our faith in Christ as our Savior and Lord we enter into a personal relationship with God the Father who is intimately aware and concerned about you and me. His thoughts towards us always has our best interest in mind. His thoughts towards you and me are precious. Therefore, knowing that should have an impact on the way we fellowship with Him. It certainly had an impact on David as he entered into his time of fellowship with the only true and living God.

ASK GOD TO CHANGE YOU

Notice what David asked for as he had fellowship with God. In **Psalm 139:23-24** David said, ***“Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my anxious thoughts; and see if there be any hurtful way in me, and lead me in the everlasting way.”***

In this Psalm we discover that David hated those who hated God, those who took His name in vain and those who were wicked. David hated those who hated God with the utmost hatred and even wanted God to take their lives (**Psalm 139:19-22**). However, notice that David did not

ask God to change his enemies. He did not ask God to change his children or his wife. He did not ask God to change his circumstances. He did not ask God to change anything or anyone but himself. David knew that God knew all things including the condition of his heart and the motives behind his words and actions. So, David asked God to change him from the inside out. David was willing to eat his peas and lima beans, so-to-speak.

KNOW GOD'S DESIRE FOR YOU

How does God reveal to us the true condition of our hearts, our most hidden thoughts and the motives behind our actions? How does He lead us in the everlasting way? I know of only one way, it is when we dine with Him around His Word.

We are told in **Hebrews 4:12**, *“For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.”* God already knows our thoughts and the intentions of our heart whether they are right or wrong. What He wants to do is reveal to us if our thoughts and the intentions of our hearts are honoring to Him. If they are not honoring to Him, then He wants to change and redirect those thoughts. He wants to change our intentions as needed so we honor Him in all things.

How does God make those kinds of changes? The answer: It is when we dine with Him around His Word. In **2 Timothy 3:16** we are told, *“All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness...”* God takes His Word by His Holy Spirit working in us and convicts us of wrong thinking and wrong behavior. Then, He shows us how to correct our wrong thinking and behavior. He gently guides us by His Spirit into the everlasting way, a way that honors Him. When we stumble, and we all have, He helps us to get back on our feet. When we get discouraged and say, *“I can't do that”* He comes along side to help. As the Lord said to Zerubbabel, *“Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit...”* (**Zechariah 4:6**).

When we dine with God and enter into that time of sweet fellowship with Him we should do so with a heart that is ready to be molded into a heart for God. When we enter into our time of fellowship with the only true and living God we should do so as a piece of soft clay, ready to be shaped into the person God wants us to be. He wants to changed us in such a way that our countenance will be noticeable different. He wants to change us so others will see our changed lives and be drawn to Jesus. He wants our joy to be full. He wants us to be living evidence for His existence.

That kind of changed life, the way we think and behave, can be illustrated in many ways. It may be different in your life then it is in mine, because God works with each of us individually. I'll give you an example from my own life that will, perhaps, help illustrate how God works.

As my late wife and I were in a time of fellowship with God around His Word we were reading several Bible passages that talked about loving one another and how we should talk about one another. Passages such as **John 13:35** where Jesus said, *“By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another”* and **Ephesians 4:29** that said, *“Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth...”* God convicted both of us in how we talked about each other to our friends and family. So we made a promise to each other and to our Lord.

She would not talk to her girl friends about me in a negative way and I would not talk to my buddies about her in a negative way. Each of us wanted the assurance that when we were with our friends, we knew that each of us had held up one another in high esteem. We did not want to dishonor each other in any way and we did not want to dishonor God in any way. So we decided if we had an issue to resolve we would work it out between the three of us. Yes, I said the three of us, my wife and me, and our Lord. We determined to let the Lord change one of us or both of us.

We decided to let Him convict us of wrong behavior and redirect our lives as necessary. We decided to allow Him to change and develop our character. We decided to let Him change our attitudes, even our perspective on life and how we treated each other. In other words, we decided to eat or peas and lima beans.

CHAPTER FOUR

TALKING TO GOD

1 Thessalonians 5:17

“...pray without ceasing...”

As we dine with God something else takes place that is absolutely amazing. It is one of the most incredible things that I have learned. However, before I share what that is, I must explain how to have a personal relationship with the only true and living God. The two are linked together.

People have said to me, *“You’re telling me I can have a personal relationship with God? Really? How is that possible?”* Entering into a personal relationship with God is not difficult. It begins at the moment we are saved. It begins when we in our heart of hearts believe in Jesus Christ as our Savior and Lord. In other words, when we believe that Jesus took upon Himself God’s judgment for our sins while upon the cross, thereby forgiving our sins and that He rose again from the dead to give us eternal life with Him, we are saved. **Romans 10:9-10** says, *“...if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses resulting in salvation.”* At that moment of salvation several things take place that brings us into a personal relationship with God.

- First, we are transferred into His kingdom. **Colossians 1:13-14** says, *“For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.”* When we enter our Lord’s kingdom, we enter a new realm of existence. We enter that place where we have fellowship with God and He with us.
- Second, we are reconciled with God. We are restored in our relationship with the only true and living God. In **2 Corinthians 5:17-18** we are told, *“Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come. Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ...”* We are made new in Christ, *“The old things passed away; behold new things have come.”* Part of those new things is being reconciled with God. Our personal relationship with God is restored. We enter into fellowship with Him just as He intended for us to have from the beginning of creation. How does God do that? One way is by giving us His Holy Spirit to dwell within us (**1 Corinthians 6:19-20**) who then lets us know we are children of God (**Romans 8:16**) who then teaches us (**1 John 2:27**) who leads us

(Galatians 5:18-26) in our walk with God and in our fellowship with God. The Holy Spirit helps us grow in our new personal relationship with God.

When we are saved we enter into a personal relationship with God. It is that simple. Anyone can receive God's gift of salvation and enter into a personal relationship with Him. If that is your desire then go the Father in a prayer. You can pray this prayer or put it into your own words. *"My dear heavenly Father, Please forgive me of my sins. I believe in Jesus Christ as my Savior and Lord. I believe He died for my sins and that You raised Him from the dead so I can have eternal life. Please come into my life and bring me into a personal relationship with You. Amen."* If you made that prayer from your heart, then you are saved. Your sins are forgiven, you have been reconciled with God and His Holy Spirit now dwells within you. You are now part of God's eternal family and you now have a personal relationship with Him.

In **1 Corinthians 1:9** we are told, *"God is faithful, through whom you were called into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord."* When we place our faith in Jesus we have invited Him into our lives, in essence to dine with us and we with Him. In **Revelation 3:20**, Jesus said, *"Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me."* In other words, we enter into fellowship with the only true and living God.

THE ATTITUDE

One of the most incredible things that we can ever learn regarding our personal relationship with God is the fact that we can talk to God all the time about everything. In **1 Thessalonians 5:17**, we are told *"...pray without ceasing..."* Prayer in its purest form is simply talking with God. According to this verse, we are to talk to God constantly.

Quite often we see pray as a formal time where we are on our knees or in some other posture or going through some ritual. For example, Daniel had a formal time of prayer three times a day. **Daniel 6:10** tells us, *"Now when Daniel knew that the document was signed (see Daniel 6:7-8), he entered his house (now in his roof chamber he had windows open towards Jerusalem); and he continued kneeling on his knees three times a day, praying and giving thanks before his God, as he had been doing previously."*

Sometimes we see prayer in more of a structured format. Jesus seemed to teach that formality in what we call the Lord's Prayer in **Matthew 6:9-13**. He said, *"Pray, then in this way: 'Our Father who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we have forgiven our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Yours is the kingdom and power and the glory forever. Amen.'" We have all, on occasion, recited that prayer and certainly there is nothing wrong with that. There are times when that kind of formal prayer is very appropriate.*

Nehemiah had his time of formal prayer when He prayed night and day (see **Nehemiah 1:6**), yet he also engaged in quick spontaneous prayer. When Nehemiah was asked by king Artaxerxes what he wanted, he prayed silently and quickly on the spot before he gave the king his answer. Nehemiah recalls the situation in **Nehemiah 2:4** saying, *"Then the king said to me, 'What would you request?' So I prayed to God in heaven."* Nehemiah did not get down on his knees to

pray. That would not have been very appropriate. He was standing in the presence of a very powerful king. Instead, Nehemiah threw up a brief and silent prayer to his all-powerful God.

Sometimes we can get so focused on the mechanics of prayer that we diminish the purpose and power of prayer. Prayer is simply talking with God. Since we are called into fellowship with God, then we can talk with Him all the time about everything. We can have a prayerful attitude all the time. The command to “...*pray without ceasing*...” conveys several very important aspects to our talking with God.

First, it shows that we have access to God all the time. God would not invite us to pray without ceasing if that were not the case. When we open the door of our hearts and invite Jesus to come in, then He dines with us and we with Him (**Revelation 3:20**). In other words, we are constantly in His presence and He and the Father is constantly with us (**John 14:23**). We don't need to ask God to join us. He is already here and already listening. We don't need to have someone else pray for us. God wants to hear from you and me personally. Therefore we can talk to God anytime about anything.

Second, the command to “...*pray without ceasing*...” lets us know that God definitely wants us to talk to Him. He desires it. He even commands it. We are not to give God the silent treatment.

Have you ever been to dinner with someone and didn't know what to say. I have. In those situations we usually experience an uncomfortable silence. Sometimes that happens even as we dine with God, as we enter into fellowship with Him. We are just lost for words. What are we to say? How are we to say it? Sometimes we go through the entire day without talking to God. We talk to everyone else, but not to God. We even talk to ourselves rather than to God. Keep this in mind: We can talk to God about anything. We can talk to Him about family, friends, work, church, neighbors, troubles, joys, sorrows, hopes, fears, temptation, sins, shortcomings, goals, ambitions, spiritual matters, a parking space at a busy Mall, and the list goes on. Don't give God the silent treatment. Talk to Him about everything.

THE LATITUDE

There is an exercise we can do that comes out of **Psalm 119**. It will help us to be more open with God. It will help us talk with Him at anytime about anything.

Psalm 119 is very unique. It consists of 176 verses. It is divided into 22 sections or stanzas with each stanza consisting of eight verses. It is what we call an alphabetic acrostic in which each stanza of eight verses begins in order with a different letter from the Hebrew alphabet. Each verse within each stanza starts with the same Hebrew letter. Of the 176 verse, 172 is the psalmist talking with God. The only verses where the psalmist is not talking to God are **verses 1-3 & 115**.

In this psalm the psalmist uses several different synonyms to describe the Word of God. He uses words such as the law, testimonies, precepts, statutes, commandments, judgments, ordinances, Your word, etc. The psalmist is focusing on the main course, the Word of God, as he fellowships with God and talks to God.

Here is the suggested exercise that will help in our communications with God. Take one stanza from **Psalm 119** (eight verses) every week day (Monday through Friday) and ask yourself these questions and write down your observations:

- What did the psalmist talk to God about?
- What questions did he ask?
- What commitments did he make while talking to God?

Then, take your observations and talk to God about them. Make them personal between you and God.

Let me illustrate what I am suggesting. I am going to take the first stanza, the first eight verses of **Psalm 119**, and share with you my observations and how I have talked to God about them. In the first three verses the psalmist is making a personal observation before he begins talking to God. He said, *“How blessed are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the LORD. How blessed are those who observe His testimonies, who seek Him with all their heart. They also do no unrighteousness; they walk in His ways.”* The psalmist uses the phrase *“How blessed are those”* in verse one and again in verse two. The word blessed is in the plural form, which literally means *“Happy! Happy!”* or *“Oh, the happiness...”* The psalmist is saying that happiness is the overflow in life that takes place when people walk according to God’s Word and when they seek the Lord with all of their heart.

I have taken that observation and talked to God about it. I have thanked Him for His Word. I have asked Him to continue to build His Word into my life, so that I would do no unrighteousness. I told Him that I want to walk according to His Word in a way that would cause my life to overflow with happiness.

In **verses 4-8** the psalmist begins to talk with God. He said, *“You have ordained Your precepts, that we should keep them diligently. Oh that my ways may be established to keep Your statutes! Then I shall not be ashamed when I look upon all Your commandments. I shall give thanks to You with uprightness of heart, when I learn Your righteous judgements. I shall keep Your statutes; do not forsake me utterly!”* As I meditate and ponder those verses, I see a heart that wants to walk in the ways of God according to His Word. The psalmist said, *“...that we should keep them diligently...”* *“Oh, that my ways may be established to keep Your statutes!”* He said, *“I shall keep Your statutes...”* The psalmist told God that he would give thanks when he learned God’s ways. Then, he asked God to be patient with him, *“...do not forsake me utterly!”*

When was the last time you expressed to God a hearts desire like that? I have taken that passage and have expressed back to God my desire to learn more about His ways and His Word. I have expressed to God my desire to continually have a heart that thirsts for Him and His teachings from His Word. I have thanked Him for how He has already worked in my life, how He has already taught me His Word. Then, I asked Him to be patient with me as I continue to let Him teach me more and apply His Word to my life by the power of His Holy Spirit working in me.

My point is this: We can talk to God all the time about everything. Go through **Psalm 119** and let it grip your heart. Let it enrich your life and your time of fellowship with the only true and living God. Let it be the subject that you talk to God about as you dine with Him and He with you. Talk to God openly, from your heart. Talk to Him continually about everything. As we do, He listens, He moves in a powerful way in our lives and through our lives. We experience a personal relationship with the only true and living God. We dine with Him and as we do we have a unique and personal conversation with Him around His dining table.

 CHAPTER FIVE

HIS WORKMANSHIP

Ephesians 2:10

“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.”

There is something that we need to learn as we dine with God and that is this: God wants to do something extraordinary in our lives and with our lives.

- He wants to change our attitudes and our behavior to be more like Jesus. He does that through His Word by His indwelling Holy Spirit.
- He wants to encourage us as we walk with Him in obedience to His Word.
- He wants to help us and guide us as we go through life.
- He wants us to talk with Him anytime about anything. He wants us to enjoy that freedom.
- He wants to help us grow spiritually through His Word.

However, there is so much more that takes place as we dine with Him and He with us. He wants to do something extraordinary in our lives and with our lives.

When we enter into a personal relationship with the only true and living God, He prepares us to fellowship with Him on the highest level possible. He prepares us to become partners with Him in accomplishing His plans and purposes. He reveals to us what those plans and purposes are as we spend time with Him. God shares His hearts desires with us as we fellowship with Him around His Word. Then, He works in our lives to prepare us to do extraordinary things with our lives that brings us incredible joy, and brings Him honor, glory and praise.

CREATED FOR GOOD WORKS

In Ephesians 2:10 we are told, *“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.”* In the Greek language the word *“workmanship”* is the word *“poiēma”* from which we get our English word *“poem.”* In essence, God is telling us that we are His poem. We are His literary masterpiece. Each of our lives is the canvas on which the Father wants to create an extraordinary work of art. He is the Master Sculptor. He is the Master Potter shaping our lives to accomplish an extraordinary work.

In Isaiah 64:8 we are told, *“But now, O LORD, You are our Father, we are the clay, and You our potter; and all of us are the work of Your hand.”* We are not to be a hard clump of clay

that cannot be shaped. We are to be like a soft piece of clay in the Master's hand. We are to be moldable, pliable, willing to be shaped into extraordinary people to accomplish an extraordinary work. He is the Potter and we are the clay. We are His workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works that He has already prepared for us to accomplish.

When we enter into fellowship with God He starts His work in us to create an extraordinary person to accomplish an extraordinary work. He does not stop until His masterpiece is finished. In **Philippians 1:6** we are told, *“For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.”*

EQUIPPED FOR GOOD WORKS

How does God accomplish this work of art? How does He take this lump of clay and make it into an extraordinary person to accomplish an extraordinary work for Him? The answer: He does it through His Word as we dine with Him around His Word. **2 Timothy 3:16-17** tells us, *“All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.”*

The Word of God is the paint brush in the Master's hand. It is the chisel the Master Sculptor uses. We are diamonds in the rough and God is at work chipping away to make us into a brilliant jewel of great value to Him on earth and in His kingdom. When we dine with God around His Word, that time with Him will ultimately result in Him training us through His Word. That training results in us being equipped to do the good works that He has prepared for us to accomplish.

PREPARED FOR GOOD WORKS

We have a choice to make. Each of us must make a personal decision. In **2 Timothy 2:20-21** we are told, *“Now in a large house there are not only gold and silver vessels, but also vessels of wood and earthenware, and some to honor and some to dishonor. Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from these things, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified, useful to the Master, prepared for every good work.”* The phrase *“if anyone cleanses himself from these things”* tells us we have a choice to make. In the context in which that passage is written it tell us we can either pursue the lusts of this world or *“flee from youthful lusts and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart”* (**verse 22**). We can let Him accomplish His masterpiece or we can resist. We can either be a soft moldable piece of clay in His hand or a hard lump that never changes. We can be the canvas on which He paints or an empty easel. We can be His beautiful poem. We can have a life that is pleasing and pleasant or we can have a life that is harsh and empty. We can be a vessel that honors Him or a vessel that dishonors Him. We can be a vessel prepared for good works or we can be a vessel that is useless. The choice is ours.

Please understand this: God wants to do something extraordinary in our lives and with our lives. He wants us to get to the place where His plans are our purposes. He wants us to be partners with Him accomplishing the good works that He has prepared for us to accomplish.

What are those good works? We can make a long list. We can get involved with many worthwhile programs. There are many needs in our society that Christians can and should be in-

volved with. However, if we are not careful we can spend our time, money and energy on meaningful things and miss what God has prepared for us to accomplish.

We are told in **1 Peter 4:10**, *“As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.”* Before we get involved serving others outside the church we should be involved serving one another in the church. Why do I say that? It is because the church is the Bride of Christ. It is the crown jewel that should shine so brightly that it draws people into God’s kingdom. Until the church works together in love and in harmony serving one another and building up one another it will have little affect on the world around it. God wants to do something extraordinary in our lives before He does something extraordinary with our lives. The church is where God equips His people do His work. Notice what we are told in **Ephesians 4:11-16**. *“And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fulness of Christ. As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head even Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working together of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.”* The church is where He makes us into extraordinary people who are equipped to do an extraordinary work for Him that will build up His kingdom. To illustrate this point I’ll give a couple of personal examples.

Another man and I taught a lunchtime Bible study in one of the largest architectural firms in Los Angeles. The Lord enabled us to lead people to Christ and be His light in a down town high rise office building. However, before God could use us to do an extraordinary work for Him He had to prepare us through the ministry of His church. God gave both of us the spiritual gift of teaching, then He fine tuned that gift as we served Him in the church before He used that gift to serve Him outside the church.

I was the president of a Bible club in a fortune 500 corporation for a while. I and a few others held lunchtime Bible studies, we had special guest speakers come into the office and share their testimonies. We invited all of our coworkers to hear them speak. We held special seminars and invited everyone. We shared the gospel boldly and openly. However, before we could do an extraordinary work for God in the workplace He had to equip us through the ministries of the church. We became leaders in the church before we became leaders in the workplace.

God has a plan for our lives and His plan is to become our purpose in life. His plan is to first make us extraordinary people so we can do an extraordinary work for Him. We are *“His workmanship created in Christ for good works, which He prepared beforehand so we would walk in them.”* When we allow the Lord to do His work in us, then we will serve Him, and when we serve Him we become partners with Him in ministry, we enter into the highest level of fellowship with Him that is available to man. God wants to do something extraordinary in our lives and with our lives.

 CHAPTER SIX

EXTREME FELLOWSHIP

Revelation 3:21

“He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.”

Several amazing things take place in our lives as we dine with God, as we enter into a personal relationship with Him. None are more amazing than what I am going to share with you now.

As we all know, life can be difficult at times, making our walk with the Lord difficult. Things happen in life that we just don’t understand. I have found it helpful, in my own life, to keep the big picture in mind when life gets tough. It helps me to stay the course, to keep on going, to keep on walking with Jesus when things seem to be unraveling around me.

So, we are going to look at the big picture. We are going to look at what I have titled “*Extreme Fellowship*.” This is the ultimate pinnacle in our fellowship, the highest point, the crème de la crème (the best of the best) when it come to our relationship with God. Right after Jesus said “*if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me*” (in Revelation 3:20), He made this promise in verse 21: “*He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.*” That is amazing! That is glorious! That was the ultimate plan that God had in mind when He called us into fellowship with His Son (1 Corinthians 1:9). Everyone who “*overcomes*” will sit with Him upon His glorious throne. We will enter into the realm of extreme fellowship.

HE WHO OVERCOMES GOES TO HEAVEN

“*He who overcomes*” will go to heaven. Jesus made that promise in Revelation 3:21 to the one who “*overcomes*.” The word “*overcomes*” in the Greek language is “*nikaō*” which refers to the one who is victorious. The word is usually used concerning the one who overcomes or is victorious in the battle against the evil in this world. So the question should be asked: Who are those who overcome and how do we become one of those who overcome? We are given the answer to both of those questions in 1 John 5:4-5. It says, “*For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that overcomes the world – our faith. Who is the one who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?*”

The world and the evils in the world are described in **1 John 2:15-16**. We are told, *“Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world.”* The term “world” in this passage is a reference to that organization, headed up by Satan, that is opposed to God. Anything, any organization, or any person that puts people in opposition to God is of this world.

The one who overcomes is the one who overcomes through faith in Jesus Christ. That takes us back to the beginning of Chapter Four where I described how to have a personal relationship with the only true and living God. As we are told in **Colossians 1:13-14**, the moment we put our faith in Jesus as our Savior and Lord, God the Father *“rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption and forgiveness of sins.”* To put it another way, we overcome the influences of Satan in this world through faith in Jesus and enter into a personal relationship with Jesus that will result in us sitting with Him upon His throne in His kingdom. The very moment we open the door of our hearts and invite Jesus to dine with us and we with Him, we overcome. We are victorious. We will experience extreme fellowship with Him.

Now, what do I mean by extreme fellowship? I simply mean we will enjoy fellowship with Jesus in His kingdom for eternity as we sit with Him upon His throne. Think about it. We will enjoy face to face fellowship with the King of kings and the Lord of lords. We will look into the eyes of our Creator with awe and reverence. We will worship Him. We will fellowship with Him. *“For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known” (1 Corinthians 13:12)*. We will enjoy Him like never before as we sit with Him upon His throne with our eyes, heart and mind opened to His majestic being, and His ultimate plan and purpose for our lives. That is extreme fellowship.

HE WHO SITS WITH JESUS IN HEAVEN

Let’s keep the big picture in mind. Jesus said in **Revelation 2:26**, *“He who overcomes, and he who keeps My deeds until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations.”* The apostle Paul said to Timothy in **2 Timothy 2:12**, *“...if we endure, we will also reign with Him...”* We are told in **Revelation 5:9-10**, *“And they (referring to the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders) sang a new song, saying, ‘Worthy are You (referring to Jesus) to take the book and break its seal; for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth.’”* In **Revelation 1:5b-6** the apostle John said, *“To Him who loves us and released us from our sins by His blood – and He has made us to be a kingdom, priests to His God and Father – to Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.”* The apostle Peter said in **1 Peter 2:9-10**, *“But you (referring to all believers) are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God’s own possession so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light...”* In **Luke 22:29-30**, Jesus told His apostles, *“...and just as My Father has granted Me a kingdom, I grant you that you may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom, and you will sit*

on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.” I don’t mean to burst your bubble, but we are not going to sit around playing the harp all day.

We don’t know all that our reign with Christ will entail. We only get a little glimpse as Jesus talked to His disciples and to His apostles. We know that we are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation and that we will sit with Jesus upon His throne. We know we will have authority over the nations and we will be co-rulers with Him in His kingdom. We know we will dine with Jesus and He with us at His table now and for eternity. We will experience extreme fellowship with the only true and living God. We will enjoy the ultimate pinnacle of that fellowship. We will enjoy the highest and most glorious relationship that is possible between man and God. We will enjoy the crème de la crème (the best of the best) because of our personal relationship with God made possible through faith in Jesus Christ.

There is more to our lives in Christ than meets the eye. So let’s keep the big picture in mind. Let’s stay focused. Let’s stay strong. Let’s stay the course and keep walking with Jesus because someday we will experience and enjoy extreme fellowship with Him as we sit with Him upon His throne.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE SPIRIT

2 Corinthians 13:14

“The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all.”

There is another very important aspect to our personal relationship with the only true and living God. As we enter into fellowship with Jesus and the Father we also enter into fellowship with the Holy Spirit. The apostle Paul referred to this in 2 Corinthians 13:14. As He concluded his letter to the church at Corinth he said, *“The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all.”* Paul also referred to this fellowship with the Holy Spirit in Philippians 2:1-2. He said, *“Therefore if there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose.”* This is a very important statement because it shows that when we are all in fellowship with the Holy Spirit we are united together as God’s people in our thoughts, our love and our purpose. The fellowship of the Holy Spirit is crucial in our fellowship with Jesus, the Father and with one another.

Several years ago I attended a fourteen week course on the person and work of the Holy Spirit taught by Dr. Robert Saucy, who was a professor at Talbot Theological Seminary. I mention that only to emphasize that this is a large subject. To cover all that needs to be said about the fellowship of the Holy Spirit would take a lifetime. I am only able, with limited experience and understanding, to touch the highlights of what it means to fellowship with the Holy Spirit. However, even then, what we learn is absolutely amazing.

THE SPIRIT INDWELLS AND SEALS BELIEVERS

The first amazing thing that happens at the moment of our salvation is the Holy Spirit dwells within us. 1 Corinthians 3:16 says, *“Do you not know that you are a temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?”* In 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 we are told, *“Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.”* When we trust Jesus Christ as our personal Savior and Lord we are bought with a

price and that price was the blood of Jesus as He died for our sins upon the cross. The wages of sin is death according to **Romans 6:23**. Jesus paid that price to redeem us. Then, at the very moment we are redeemed by God through Jesus, the Holy Spirit dwells within us and not before.

Another very important work that the Holy Spirit does is found in **Ephesians 1:13-14**. We are told, *“In Him (referring to Jesus), you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation – having also believed, you were sealed in Him (in Jesus) with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God’s own possession, to the praise of His glory.”* The Holy Spirit not only comes to dwell within us at the moment of our salvation, but also seals the purchase made by Jesus. In other words, He makes it final. There are no refunds. There are no exchanges. The Holy Spirit seals the deal. Our names are permanently written in the book of life. We enter into eternal fellowship with Jesus, the Father and the Holy Spirit.

THE SPIRIT WITNESSES TO OUR SPIRIT

Once the Holy Spirit dwells within us, several things take place. The fellowship with the Spirit begins. The first thing that takes place, as the Holy Spirit begins to fellowship with us, is to let us know, without any shadow of doubt, that we are God’s children. In **Romans 8:14-16** we are told by the apostle Paul, *“For all who are being lead by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, ‘Abba! Father!’ The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God...”*

Within the first hour after I personally received Jesus Christ as my Savior and Lord my wife asked: *“Do you feel any different?”* She was not a born again Christian at the time. So, she wanted to know how I knew, and if I knew for certain, that I was saved. There were no bolts of lightning, no peals of thunder. There were just a few tears by those who were praying for my salvation. However, within that first hour of my new relationship with the only true and living God I prayed my first prayer. I told the Lord that I had no doubt that He was my Savior and Lord. I had no doubt that I was a sinner and my sins were now forgiven. However, I told Him that I did not know much else about Jesus and wanted to know more. The Lord laid upon my heart a strong desire to read **2 Peter**. I am the only Christian that I know of that began there new faith and walk with Jesus by reading **2 Peter**. As I began to read, **verses 5-8** became the answer to my first prayer. It says, *“Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge, and in your knowledge, self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance, and in your perseverance, godliness, and in your godliness, brotherly kindness, and in your brotherly kindness, love. For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.”* God answered my prayer. His Holy Spirit within me testified with my spirit that I was indeed a redeemed child of God.

Within the first day, my buddies at work noticed a difference in my behavior and in the way I talked. To them I got religion. To me I got a relationship with the only true and living God and His Spirit testified with my spirit that I was now a redeemed child of God.

God may choose to work differently in your life than He did in mine. However, this I know for certain, if you have received Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord the Holy Spirit will find a way to testify with your spirit that you are a redeemed child of God. He will give you that assurance. You begin to experience the fellowship of the Spirit.

THE SPIRIT LEADS AND GUIDES US

One of the things that we experience is the leading of the Holy Spirit in our life. As we just read in **Romans 8:14**, *“For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.”* How do we know that we are being led by the Spirit of God? How does that work in our daily lives?

In the Old Testament God led the Israelites through the wilderness by a pillar of fire at night and by a pillar of cloud during the day. Every man, woman and child knew the Lord was leading them. They knew they were following God because they could see His leading.

I want you to know, we too can follow God’s leading today. We can know that we are following God and that we are being led by His Spirit. Certainly, He does not use a pillar of fire to lead us today; instead He leads us by His Spirit according to His Word. The Holy Spirit gives us insight and the ability to understand God’s Word. Then, He gives us the desire to obey God’s Word. The Spirit reveals what God’s will is, as it is written in the Bible, and then leads us in obedience to God’s will.

It is the Spirit that convicts us of sin and leads us out of sin if we are willing to let Him lead us. As Paul said in **Galatians 5:16**, *“But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desires of the flesh.”* The key is our desire to know and to follow God’s will. The question we must ask ourselves is: Are we willing to follow the leading of God’s Spirit?

As we are told in **Proverbs 3:5-6**, *“Trust in the LORD with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight.”* Underline the words *“with all your heart”* and the words *“in all your ways.”* There is no half hearted effort. There is no partial effort if we are to follow God by the leading of His Spirit. A seeking, willing and obedient heart is always open to the leading of God’s Spirit.

David prayed in **Psalms 25:4-5** and said, *“Make me know Your ways, O LORD; Teach me Your paths. Lead me in Your truth and teach me, for You are the God of my salvation; For You I wait all the day.”* David again prayed in **Psalms 143:10** and said, *“Teach me to do Your will, for You are my God; let Your good Spirit lead me on level ground.”* David wanted to be led by God’s Holy Spirit. He wanted to walk with God on level ground where he would not fall. He expressed that desire to God in prayer.

When we truly get to a place in our lives where we want God’s Spirit to lead us, then He will. We far too often impose our will upon God and then have the audacity to call it His will. The only way we come to know God’s leading in our lives is through much prayer and through much time in His Word. As my late wife once said, *“If you want to know God’s will, then saturate yourself with the Word of God.”* I have been praying, asking God to raise up more men and women in leadership who will saturate themselves with the Word of God. Our churches desperately need such leaders. Our nation desperately needs such leaders. Our families desperately need such leaders.

I am going to get in your face for a moment. How many of you in leadership, in your homes, in the church, or in government are saturating yourselves with the Word of God? How many of you, in leadership, in your homes, in the church, or in government bath every decision in much prayer. And I do mean much prayer! If you don't do those two things, then how can you say you are being led by the Spirit in the decisions you make? I'll give you the answer: You can't. You run a high risk of imposing your will on others and calling it good or calling it the will of God. That is nothing but pure arrogance. All of us in leadership need to saturate ourselves with the Word of God and bath every decision in prayer seeking the mind of Christ and the will of God.

Now, I understand that God may choose to direct or redirect our lives through various circumstances or situations, but it is always in keeping with His Word. The Spirit never leads us in opposition to God's Word. The Spirit always leads us in a way that accomplishes God's ultimate plans and purposes. He never leads us in opposition to God's will. The Spirit always leads in a way that will bring glory to God. He never leads us in a way that will dishonor God. The Spirit will always exalt Jesus Christ and give Him His rightful place of preeminence in all things. He never diminishes the preeminence of Christ. He does not make Jesus prominent, but rather pre-eminent in all things.

THE SPIRIT TEACHES US THE THINGS OF GOD

The Spirit of God is our resident teacher. Have you ever read a book and wished you could ask the author some questions? Well, the Author of the Bible dwells within every believer and we can ask Him questions as He teaches us about the things of God. We can have fellowship with the Spirit.

Jesus told His apostles in **John 14:26**, *“But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you.”* In **John 16:13** Jesus said, *“But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come.”* The apostle John wrote to the church and said this in **1 John 2:27**, *“As for you, the anointing which you received from Him abides in you (that is a reference to the indwelling Spirit of God), and you have no need for anyone to teach you; but as His anointing teaches you about all things, and is true and not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you abide in Him.”* When we dine with God enjoying the main course, the Word of God, the Holy Spirit is involved. When we are being changed, rebuked and corrected by God through His Word (eating our peas and lima beans, the things we know are good for us but we really don't like) the Holy Spirit is involved. When we are being equipped for good works and made into extraordinary people, the Holy Spirit is involved. When we do good works accomplishing extraordinary things for God, the Holy Spirit is involved. We are led by the Spirit of God. We have fellowship with the Spirit.

When we are being taught the things of God by the Spirit of God and are being lead by the Spirit of God according to the Word of God, then the Spirit of God becomes the source of joy in our lives. One of the fruits of the Spirit is *“joy”* according to **Galatians 5:22**. Walk by the Spirit, fellowship with the Spirit and you will experience the joy of Christ.

CHAPTER EIGHT

FELLOWSHIP WITH ONE ANOTHER

1 John 1:3

“...what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ.”

We come to another aspect in our fellowship with the Father, Jesus and the Holy Spirit. In fact, we come to one of the pillars of the church. That pillar is this: We not only enter into fellowship with the only true and living God at the moment of our salvation, but we also enter into fellowship with all believers. We are adopted into God’s eternal family and we are to continue in fellowship with one another here and now.

FELLOWSHIP – A PILLAR OF THE CHURCH

In 1 John 1:1-3 the apostle John wrote these words to the early church: *“What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of Life – and the life was manifested, and we have seen and testify and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us -- what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ.”* Notice carefully what John said. He said we are to fellowship with one another, which is centered in the fellowship we have with the Father and His Son Jesus Christ.

As one reads what John wrote in the Gospel of John and his three epistles (first, second and third John) something becomes very evident. The apostle John wanted to pass on to the church what he had learned from Jesus. He wanted to pass on to all believers what Jesus taught the other apostles. John wanted to pass on what he saw Jesus do through His miracles. He wanted to pass on to the church what he experienced with Jesus as he walked with Him, talked with Him and served Him.

The apostles saw first hand our Lord’s holiness. They experienced first hand our Lord’s love and abundant grace. They experienced His humility, His patience, unselfishness, compassion and power. John, Peter and James saw first hand His glory on the mount of transfiguration when His face radiated with glory as bright as the sun (Matthew 17:1-2). John wanted to pass on what he

saw and heard and touched to the church, and to all believers. This was what took place in the life of the early church as believers gathered in fellowship.

The church was to continue in the apostle's teaching and in fellowship around that teaching. In **Acts 2:42** we see what happened when the church gathered together. We are told, *"They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer."* The apostles teaching and fellowship is grouped together as one activity. In other words, they learned what the apostles taught and then talked about how to live it, how to put it into practice in their daily lives. As James said in **James 1:22**, *"But prove yourselves doers of the Word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves."* We are not to let the apostles teaching, the Word of God (**1 Thessalonians 2:13**) go in one ear and out the other. We are to let it grip our heart and we are to talk with other believers about how to put it into practice. That is what true fellowship with one another is all about.

In a similar way, we are to do today what the first century church did. The church today is to have godly men and women who will pass on what they have learned about Jesus and what they have experienced with Jesus to the next generation. As the apostle Paul wrote to Timothy he gave instruction that was to be the mode of operation within the church. He said in **2 Timothy 2:1-2**, *"You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also."* This is the heart of having true fellowship with one another. It is learning and then passing on to others the apostles teaching, the Word of God. We are not only to pass on the teaching, but also the applications of God's Word to the next generation by our words and by our example. There needs to be more one-on-one mentoring or discipleship with one another.

The redeemed children of God (all believers) in the early church needed to see God working in and through the apostles. They needed to see Jesus in them working by the power of His Holy Spirit as an example for them to follow. Today it is no different. The redeemed children of God today (all believers) need to see Jesus at work in other godly men and women. We all need to see Jesus in others at work by the power of the Holy Spirit as an example for us to follow. We all need to devote ourselves to the apostles teaching, the Word of God, and to fellowship with one another around that teaching. We are to pass on the apostles teaching, God's Word, and the applications from God's Word to the next generation, or individual believers will become lukewarm and ineffective for Jesus Christ. This kind of fellowship is desperately needed today.

Fellowship around God's Word is like a tender plant. It must be nurtured, cared for and protected or it will wither and die. Today we need to cultivate our fellowship with one another. We need to maintain our fellowship with God and with one another by learning what God's Word says and by talking about how to apply His Word to our lives. We need to fellowship with those who are role models. We all have a responsibility to one another and to the next generation to make sure the fellowship that existed within the early church exists and continues today.

FELLOWSHIP – OUR RESPONSIBILITY TO THE NEXT GENERATION

We are told in **Hebrews 10:22-25**, *"...let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with*

pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.” There are three responsibilities that we all have that are revealed in those verses. Each responsibility is identified by the opening phrase “*let us*” in **verses 22, 23 and 24**. The three responsibilities that we all have are these:

- We are to worship together with a sincere and pure heart (**verses 22**).
- We are to maintain an unwavering faith (**verse 23**).
- We are to stimulate one another to love and good deeds not forsaking our assembling together (**verses 24-25**). We are to encourage one another.

I want to focus on that third responsibility. We are not to forsake our fellowship together. We are to encourage one another. We cannot encourage one another when we are not in fellowship with one another. We cannot do our part to stimulate one another to love and good deeds if we are not consistently in fellowship with God’s people on a weekly basis.

I’ll give you a word picture that might help illustrate what happens when we are not in fellowship with one another as we should be. We have all sat around a camp fire at night watching the fire burning. When the coals in the fire are together there is warmth and heat radiating from the fire. To put it another way, there is a fire going on in the midst of the coals. When a single coal is isolated from the others it soon loses its warmth and heat. The fire from that single coal will go out. That is what happens within our Christian lives.

When we are in fellowship with one another, as it is taught in the Bible, there is a fire burning in our midst. We are encouraged by one another. We become stimulated to love and good deeds by one another. We worship together with a sincere and pure heart. Our faith becomes stronger and unwavering. However, when we don’t fellowship together, as taught in the Bible, we grow cold in our faith. We lose our fervor for Christ. Our faith does not grow stronger as it should. Our worship becomes less vibrant. We grow colder towards the things of God. We do not put ourselves in a place where we can encourage other believers. As a result, we have little or no influence in the lives of the next generation of believers. When that happens we will have little or no influence on the world around us.

We have a responsibility to the next generation. We need to make sure they are in fellowship with other godly believers and with us. We need to mentor and disciple the next generation. We need to pass on the Word of God and the applications from the Word of God to the next generation. We need to be role models that they can trust and follow, or we are going to lose them.

We need to resist the pressures that draw us away from fellowship with one another and with God around His Word. We all know what those pressures are. They are the excuses we use to not assemble together with other believers. We use excuses like: I had to work, I had a family gathering, I had a scout outing, I was invited to the game, I was sick, I don’t like the teaching or preaching, etc. We have all used those excuses and sometimes they are valid excuses, but not on a regular basis.

When we forsake our assembling together with other believers we hurt ourselves, we hurt the church and we hurt the next generation. We send a message and that message says my fellowship with you is not that important, my learning from you on how to apply God’s Word to my life is

not that important. People who do not make fellowship with one another a priority become discouraged not encouraged. They discourage themselves as well as others.

We all should give thanks to God for the believers He has placed in our lives. We should thank God for the spiritual blessings they provide us and for the opportunities we have to be a blessing to them. So, let's not forsake our assembling together as is the habit of some. Let's renew our commitment to find ways to stimulate one another to love and good deeds. Let's talk about ways to do that during your time of fellowship. Let's encourage one another and stop discouraging one another. Let's become a role model for others to follow. Let's cultivate our fellowship with one another as God intended. Let's pass on to the next generation the apostles teaching, the Word of God, and the applications of God's Word. Let's experience the joy God intended us to have as we fellowship with Him and His people, so we become living evidence for His existence. Let's dine with God. Let's experience a personal relationship with Him.