



# Spiritual Disciplines: Fellowship

**iFOLLOW**

Walking with Jesus

The iFollow Discipleship Series

## About the iFollow Discipleship Series Pastor's Edition

### Categories

The iFollow Discipleship Series is designed to be used in congregations to assist people in their pursuit of God. This assumes that individuals are in unique places in their journey and there is no perfect set of lessons that everyone must complete to become a disciple—in fact discipleship is an eternal journey. Therefore the iFollow curriculum is a menu of milestones that an individual, small group, or even an entire church can choose from. The lessons can be placed in three general categories: **Meeting with Jesus** (does not assume a commitment to Jesus Christ); **Walking with Jesus** (assumes an acceptance of Jesus Christ); and **Working with Jesus** (assumes a desire to serve Jesus Christ).

### Components

Each lesson has a presenter's manuscript which can be read word for word, but will be stronger if the presenter puts it in his/her own words and uses personal illustrations. The graphic slides can be played directly from the Pastor's DVD or customized and played from a computer. There are also several group activities and discussion questions to choose from as well as printable student handouts.

### Usage

The lessons are designed to be used in small groups, pastor's Bible classes, prayer meetings, seminars, retreats, training sessions, discussion groups, and some lessons may be appropriate sermon outlines.

### Credits

**Curriculum Development:** The iFollow Discipleship Series Pastor's Edition curriculum development was lead by the **Center for Creative Ministry**. **General Editor:** Monte Sahlin; **Assistant Editor:** Debbonnaire Kovacs; **Directional Advisory:** Brad Forbes, Carole Kilcher, Ceri Myers, Cesar Gonzalez, Clayton Kinney, Curtis Rittenour, Dave Osborne, Dave VanDenburgh, Gerry Chudleigh, Jane Thayer, Jerry Thomas, John Appel, Jose Rojas, Kim Johnson, Nicole Chao, Paul Richardson, Rich DuBose, Shasta Nelson, William Sutton; **Pastoral Advisory:** Claudio Consuegra, Collette Pekar, Dave Hutman, Don Driver, Fredrick Russell, Jerry Nelson, Jesse Wilson, Leslie Bumgardner, Loren Fenton, Rebecca Brillhart; **Unit Authors:** Alberto Valenzuela, Althea Pineda, Corienne Hay, Debbonnaire Kovacs, Ed Dickerson, Gianluca Bruno, Gil Bahnsen, Greg Nelson, Jack Calkins, James Whibberding, Karen Collum, Monte Sahlin, Norma Sahlin, Pam Splawinski, Patty Ntuhuka, Reinder Bruinsma, Ryan Bell; **Additional contribution** by Maria Ovando-Gibson; **Additional editing:** Dave Gemmell, Meredith Carter; **Graphic Design:** Mind Over Media; **Layout:** Paul D. Young; **Web Development:** Narrow Gate Media.

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# The Spiritual Discipline of Fellowship

*This presentation is designed for people who have decided to accept Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior.*

## Learning Objectives

1. Understand God's ideal of fellowship
2. Review Bible examples of successful and unsuccessful fellowship
3. Learn why fellowship is so important to the human being
4. Discover helps and hindrances to fellowship
5. See the results of faithful fellowship
6. Evaluate and improve fellowship-building skills

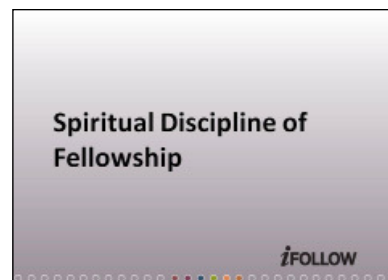
## Content Outline

1. God created humans to live in relationships
2. Sin undermined fellowship
3. Old Testament story through which God hoped to teach true fellowship
4. Jesus came to show us God's love in fellowship
5. Jesus prayed for His followers to have perfect unity with God and each other.
6. The early church experienced unprecedented unity
7. Real fellowships of real people are messy business
8. Three "One Another" passages in Romans 12, Ephesians 4, and 1 Corinthians 12
9. Suggested evaluation questions

## Background Material for the Presenter

Fellowship, like God, is, was, and will be. Before our universe, there was fellowship. Before time as we measure it began, there was fellowship. God's proclaimed goal is that when time ends, what will remain is a perfect community.

It begins with the incomprehensible nature of our Creator. No human mind can imagine what a three-person personality really is, but that's what God presents to us



as both fact and faith. Something like we would imagine a parent, something like we would imagine a child, and something like we would imagine. . . wind? Light? Water? Oil? Frankly, Spirit is something we *can't* really imagine! And the whole truth is, *God* is nothing like we could ever imagine.

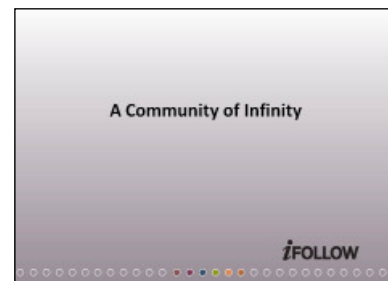
So He (They?) set out to create beings “like us” (Gen. 1:26) and then to spend the rest of eternity showing us, if one may coin an odd word, *Themselves*.

God began by creating a community we like to call the biosphere. It's a growing, self-contained, self-renewing, interdependent ecosystem of living beings. Then He made people, and according to verse 27, apparently one way to illustrate the unity within the Godhead was by creating two genders who were “fit for each other.” Hebrew *'ezer*, which comes from the root *'azar*, meaning to “surround, protect, or aid.” (*Strong's Concordance*) It is of great interest that this word is the Hebrew equivalent of *paraclete*, the word used in the New Testament for the Holy Spirit.

So human fellowship began. Almost immediately, the best and the worst features of community were made manifest. These two people, God declared, were “one flesh,” (2:24) to cling together above all others, to “surround, protect, and aid” one another. It is no longer possible for us to conceive what that perfect unity was like. We can speculate that the nakedness and lack of shame described in verse 25 included complete transparency and understanding as they grew to know each other. We do know it included perfect unity with their Maker, Who came to walk and talk with them in the evenings. (3:8)

We also don't know how long it lasted, but it doesn't seem to have been long. One day, a thief in the form of a serpent entered their paradise. Satan had chosen to give up the community where he had been known and loved and try a different kind. He wasn't finding it as enjoyable as he had hoped, it seems, and in his rage and jealousy, he wanted to break up the happiness he saw. Divide and conquer was his first thought. And it worked. Away from the other helper's strengthening presence, one person was easy to beat.

When God came calling, the broken style of human fellowship was already in force. “She did it!” “It was his fault!” “Well, **You're** the one who made her, God!” From that day, humanity was no longer able to have direct contact with God. And it wasn't long at all until animals and humans began killing each other. Yet there was and is a deep, unquenchable, overriding *ache* for union, for fellowship, for the longed-for Other in every person born. We seem to have both the famous “God-shaped void” of Augustine and a hole in our hearts for another person who will love us as we are.



A desperate need to belong to a group of people who accept us and help to form us and learn from us. A wish that a group could be somehow better for our presence, lessened by our loss.

We try so hard to figure out how to fill those holes. We run from one sexual relationship to another. We create gangs. We live in communes. We go to churches, synagogues, mosques and the corner tavern. Or we hide from each other and try to plug the holes by ourselves through drugs or overwork or simply filling our mind with empty daydreams. Is this what God made us for? Didn't He have a better plan than this?

## God Tries Again

Genesis is a particularly detailed picture of covenant relationships being broken and mended, of God's unending work of reconciliation between person and person, and between person and Creator. Among other things, it shows that most of what God has accomplished in human history has been done through families. God first reassured Adam and Eve that He had not and would not abandon them, but that He would send a redeemer. (Gen. 3:15) Not long after that, He attempted to reconcile Cain and Abel. (Gen. 4:6, 7) When that failed because of free will (God's greatest ally and fiercest enemy), He worked through Seth's line, one of whom, Enoch, was the first prophet to be shown great reunion of the second coming, as far as we know. (Jude 14) It was a family in that same line, Noah's family, who consented to salvation in the form of the ark.

But God's new beginning after the Flood didn't seem to do much better. The world-wide community of humans, speaking one language and working together, conspired to "reach the heavens" with the tower now known as Babel because of what God did there. (Gen. 11) He broke up the community! Why would God do that? Apparently, to make new, smaller communities of languages and kindreds, through whom He might work more closely.

God chose another family - the clan of Abram and Sarai of Chaldea, soon to become Abraham and Sarah, friends of God. It was, on the whole, a pretty dysfunctional family. They kept trying to "help" God accomplish His purposes, and there was enough infighting to supply a long soap opera series. Is *this* what God means by fellowship?

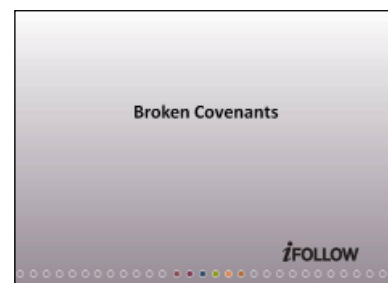
Partly, yes. We are shown people making choices that break relationships, then often

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getting another chance to choose again. So Jacob, at Jabbok (Gen. 32:28-30), becomes Israel, another friend of God. He reconciles with the brother he had cheated years earlier. (Gen. 33:3, 4) Joseph reconciles with the brothers who sold him into slavery, and reunites his family. (Gen. 45) It is Joseph, again, who reiterates what could almost be the thesis sentence for all of Genesis: "Do not be afraid. . . You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good." (Gen. 50:19, 20)

Eventually, God rescues Abraham's sons and daughters, now as "numerous as the stars," from the land of Egypt where they had been slaves and nearly forgotten all about true worship. He draws them out to the wilderness with Himself, where they can become a true covenant fellowship, and even teaches them an entire system of worship based around the covenant of love between God and His children. But they continue a pattern of trying to connect with various forms of false worship they see around them, in a union that is doomed from the start.

God sends prophets to call the people back into fellowship with each other and Himself. But by this time the system of worship He gave them has degenerated into list after list of rules, and what little ability some people had to try to imagine the face of God is nearly obliterated. Is *this* what God means by fellowship?

## God Shows His Own Face

There is only one thing to do. God has planned it all along, and at just the right time, Jesus comes to live and die as a human being and teach us firsthand what real unity is all about. First, He lives in a family - possibly a rather dysfunctional one in some ways. He shows us it is possible to love them anyway. Then He chooses a small group of people to take with Him everywhere and train. It is instructive that He seems to spend more time simply letting them follow Him around and watch Him work and work with Him, than telling them things. He does teach them, too, and when He does, He calls God "Daddy," (a shocking idea to an observant Jew of the time), and talks a lot about God's *basileia* or realm (from *basis*, a base, according to *Strong's*), where things are completely upside down and sideways from anybody's idea of a normal realm or kingdom.

In this "Realm of God," people are supposed to be like little children. (Matt. 18:4) As Isaiah wrote, "A little child shall lead them." (Isa. 11:6) In this realm, a son who ran off with his father's goods, wasted it all, and ruined his life is welcomed back with open arms and no condemnation. (Luke 15:11-32) Did not Jeremiah say something like that? "Ephraim is my darling son ... I will have mercy on him." (Jer. 31:18-20) In this kingdom, the last was supposed to be first, the greatest like the youngest, and the ruler like a servant. (Luke 22:2, 27) Wasn't the great King David himself chosen as the

youngest of his house, and didn't the law say that a king's heart must not be lifted up above his countrymen? (Deut. 17:20)

When they listened to Jesus, the people's hearts must have stirred and tingled like something long asleep beginning to awaken, like something lost showing up unexpectedly, like something forgotten, now newly remembered. Crowds followed Him, hanging on His every word. Women ministered to Him and paid His way out of their own pockets. Children brought Him their lunches, and thousands ate together like one family. A Roman centurion, lepers, women from Syro-Phoenicia and Samaria, demoniacs from "the other side of the water," and at least one highly-placed Pharisee reached out to Jesus, and in so doing, came a little closer to each other. So *this* is what God means by fellowship!

By the end of Jesus' earthly life, His friends may sometimes be bright-eyed with hope and possibilities, but they're not really getting it. They argue over who's greater and beg for the best places in His government and run away when He's arrested. Two of them betray Him, one with a kiss and one with an oath. It is in the middle of this confusion that Jesus prays His ultimate prayer request for His followers in all ages.

"As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. For their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they themselves also may be sanctified in truth. I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; that they may all be one, even as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me.

The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one; I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me. Father, I desire that they also, whom You have given Me, be with Me where I am, so that they may see My glory which You have given Me, for You loved Me before the foundation of the world. O

righteous Father, although the world has not known You, yet I have known You, and these have known that You sent Me; and I have made Your name known to them, and will make it known, so that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them." (John 17:18-26)



There are many fascinating mind-stretchers in this prayer. "You in Me, I in You, they in Us ... I in them, you in Me." Try drawing a diagram of that! But there is a good deal more than first meets the eye. It is most often assumed, for instance, that when Jesus asks His Father "that they ... be where I am," He is speaking of going with Him to heaven someday, and so He no doubt is. But take a look at Ephesians 2:6 where God "raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Je-



sus.” Was this, in fact, also an immediate prayer request? Was it fulfilled soon, in some way? Is it fulfilled now?

“So that they may see my glory.” Does this only mean His glory after all things are completed, or does it mean something present and immediate? When is/was Jesus’ moment of greatest glory? Is it the brilliance of His presence on the throne (with us, incomprehensibly!), the blinding flash of His second coming? Perhaps the second of the resurrection, when soldiers fell like flies? Or is it the bloody, gasping spectacle of the Son of God and man giving up His life for us? Those He prayed for that night were about to see that. Not only that, but millions have been staring spellbound, (or averting their eyes from) that heartrending scene for twenty centuries now.

Here’s what we know. Jesus’ ideal of fellowship for us is higher than we ever could have imagined.

## The Great Experiment

And so it began, the greatest experiment the world has ever known. Now that we had seen and touched the face of God, was it possible for a human community to actually live out this astonishing ideal? There is a lot riding on it. One of the things Jesus asked of His Father on that dark night appears to be dependent on this unity. **“That the world may believe.”** In other words, when Christians live in loving fellowship with God and each other, the world “may believe.” There are two ways, in English, that this phrase can be taken. It may indicate **possibility**; in other words, “It’s possible that the world will believe if they see your love.” Or it may mean *ability*; that is, “Your love will make them able to believe it. They can’t, if they don’t see love as a result.”

No doubt both of these are true. Some people never will believe in the admittedly outlandish story that the Creator of all things came down and became a baby, lived without sin, and died to make it somehow possible for us to be reunited with this Creator. Let’s face it—that is outlandish! Who **could** believe it? Those who see that the result of believing it is a depth of love they have never experienced **may** believe. It seems that the Holy Spirit can produce a mature and profound Christian love and unity that may also seem outlandish and unbelievable. Our love of each other, therefore, takes on a truly sacramental value; that is to say, it connects us to a fuller life of the Spirit, as does any sacrament, and it reaches out to make a connection as well to anyone nearby that it can reach.

After praying this eloquent prayer, Jesus proceeded to demonstrate the power of this outrageous love in the most profound way possible. He walked steadfastly to hell and back for us. He suffered, thinking only of Peter and His other disciples, the

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women crying by the way, His mother. He died, paying attention to the soldiers, and the seeking lost one dying beside Him. He rose again in a flash of lightning, yet His first thought was for Mary Magdalene, and His second appears to have been for the guilt and shame Peter was bowed under. He comforted them, fed them, tried to give them some last words, breathed the Spirit on them, and finally went back to His Father, leaving the work He had begun to be finished by shaky human hands. Heaven and all its angels united with the handful of bewildered believers who went back to the Upper Room to pray. And study. And discuss. And debate. And pray some more. Until they were “of one mind.” (Acts 1:14) On Pentecost, the day the Jews celebrate the giving of the law on Mt. Sinai, the Holy Spirit crashed into their lives in a new and more powerful manifestation.

Three thousand people, people who had seen the crucifixion a few weeks earlier, people who might have seen resurrected people of earlier ages wandering around, people, probably, who had shouted, “Crucify Him!” Three thousand people joined the new community that day. What do you do with 3,000 new believers when there are only 120 of you to begin with. What do you do? Acts 2:42-47 lays out the beginning of the Grand Experiment:

“They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles. And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common; and they began selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need. Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.”



Verse 42 lists four things they were devoting themselves to; the foundational elements of the new Christian fellowship:

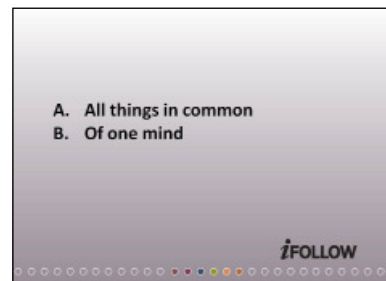
1. Apostles’ teaching
2. Fellowship
3. Breaking of bread
4. Prayer

There is more detail added in verse 46. They were in the temple daily (not necessarily all of them at once), and this may, at this early point, have even been where the

apostles were teaching. Perhaps they taught in the courts, as Jesus had. This would explain why so many were being added. Many of those who had heard Jesus, but hadn't really believed or hadn't committed, did now. The fellowship and breaking of bread, verse 46 says, took place in homes. So it is clear that this throng of people were somehow organized into smaller fellowships, ones that fit into houses. Prayer, of course, was everywhere, as it always is.

All of these are things Christians do today. We, too, devote ourselves to the preaching and teaching of the leaders among us. We, too, value fellowship and friendship, both at weekly worship services and in our homes. We break bread together, in communion services, at home meals, church potluck meals, picnics, and pretty much any other chance we have to eat together. We pray. The healthiest of us pray daily, and pray all day long. We strive to live our lives in the constant atmosphere of prayer.

Why, then, does this description of early unity seem so different to us? Why do we read these verses with such wishfulness for what seems a vanished and elusive joy? If the church today wants to replicate and continue this experience of communal living, there are several things we must explore. Two major differences strike us.



**1. All Things in Common:** First, the text says they “were together and had all things in common.” This can’t mean they lived all in one building, or even in one enclave. This is a tremendous number of people, in a time when whole towns numbered in the hundreds. There would have been no building big enough. Besides, it says they broke bread “from house to house.” Most of the people who heard Peter’s pentecostal sermon had probably come to Jerusalem for the festival season just past, and they went to their countries and carried this exciting news with them. They must have done the same things in their homelands—praised together in crowds when they could, and lived and worked in daily contact with their own growing circles at home. But many lived there, or chose to stay. In what ways did they exercise this commonality?

One possibility is that at first they may have believed Jesus was coming back right away. It could have been an atmosphere somewhat like that of the Great Disappointment in 1844, when thousands of believers in the Advent thought Jesus was coming that year. They, too, lost interest in earthly things, shared what they had, even left crops unharvested. The early church does not appear to have gone to that extreme, but they did share more than we’ve come to see as normal, even selling houses and lands so they could meet each other’s needs.

It is certain that when a person truly gets hold of the gospel—truly understands that Jesus has opened a clear path to the presence of God for whoever will accept it—day-to-day mundane details of living lose some of their hold. Once you get a glimpse of how much God loves *you*, and begin to return that love, you start to notice those around you in a new light. If they have a need, and you can fulfill it, it just comes naturally to do so, and you know it goes both ways. When you have a need, you are not afraid to share it with these brothers and sisters.

There have been endless attempts to recreate something like this atmosphere, both spiritual ones such as monasteries, convents, intentional religious communities, and a proliferation of cults of all varieties, and secular ones such as the *kibbutzim* in Israel and environmentally aware communes in various places. If they are places where people visit for a certain length of time, they seem to retain their feel of “something different”—more togetherness than we are used to. Something we like, but then want to leave and go home, back to life as we find it more comfortable, not quite so united. If they are communities people bind themselves to by lifetime vow, and which are also bound by prayer, like monasteries and convents, they can last for centuries, though not without lists of rules, often long and minute. All other attempts generally seem to break down after awhile and disappear. Certainly state attempts at communism as a system of government have not succeeded in providing for even the physical needs of citizens, let alone an atmosphere such as described in Acts.

**2. Of One Mind:** It does seem that if one could effectively create a group whose members were likeminded about things in general, community living would succeed much better. But what does “of one mind” mean? Does it mean they all thought just alike? That can’t be, or there wouldn’t be so many counsels later encouraging diversity. Besides, it’s impossible to think the exact same way in any two languages, let alone in many of them, as they had that day. And if it did mean to think alike, the personality cults we’ve seen in the past century would have worked better.

Well, does it mean they agreed on everything? If so, how could Peter and Paul, or Paul and Barnabas have such sharp disagreements later? Unless we wish to believe that these men were not in the Spirit during the times they had these disagreements, we must accept the fact that sanctified Christians can disagree, sometimes vehemently.

If there is one thing we know, it is that God created us individuals, with different ways of being. So what *does* “of one mind” mean? Let’s look more closely at the verse. They “all with one mind were continually devoting themselves to prayer.” Ah. They all agreed on one thing, at least. They agreed they needed lots of prayer.

There are dozens of other texts in the New Testament which speak of being of one mind, or likeminded. Let’s look at some and see if there are other specific definitions.

**(Handout 1 can be used here.)**

Be of the same mind toward one another; do not be haughty in mind, but associate with the lowly. Do not be wise in your own estimation. Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men. If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. (Rom. 12:16-18)

There are some specific characteristics of like-mindedness here. When we are like-minded, we will not be haughty, or wise in our own estimation. We won't seek revenge. We will respect—an interesting phrase—"what is right in the sight of all." What we do have in common, in other words. This little phrase could be one of the most important of all. We could actually make it a practice to respect what was right in the sight of all and leave the rest to God, instead of doing our utmost to be sure everyone else believes what's *really* right - that is, what I believe! In the last line, Paul recognizes that it is, unfortunately, not always in our power to be at peace with all. But we can do our prayerful best, and that will never happen so long as some of us see it as our duty to correct the beliefs and behaviors of others.

"Now may the God who gives perseverance and encouragement grant you to be of the same mind with one another according to Christ Jesus, so that with one accord you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." (Rom. 15:6)

Like-mindedness takes perseverance and courage, which come from God. It is about glorifying God, not ourselves.

"Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment." (1 Cor. 1:10)

This passage looks, at first, as if it does mean to think exactly alike and judge everything the same. To be understood, it needs to be read in context. People were dividing up in the name of their favorite preachers. "I'm a follower of ... Billy Graham? Ellen White? Mark Finley?" If there is one thing in the world every Christian, of every background, of every faith tradition, liberal, conservative, or purple polka-dotted needs to be in agreement on, it is that we are followers of Christ! Let's enjoy the preaching and teaching of whichever of God's messengers speaks our own peculiar language. But let's not get the servant mixed up with the Master.



“Finally, brethren, rejoice, be made complete, be comforted, be like-minded, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you.” (2 Cor 13:11)

Here, like-mindedness is linked to completion and comfort, and leads to peace. Isn't it a good feeling to be mature enough to think your very own thoughts and let others think theirs, trusting the One Lord of us all to make mistakes clear in His own time?

“Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I will hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel; in no way alarmed by your opponents. ... Make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose.” (Phil 1:27, 2:2)

God's followers may disagree courteously on all kinds of things, but they are standing firm in one Spirit, united in love, and intent on one purpose—striving for the faith of the gospel. When is it that we have reason to be alarmed by our opponents? When they can rightly point a finger at our bitter spirit, divisiveness, and lack of love. If we unite in God's love, we will not have that to fear. But it seems impossible. You would have to be like Jesus. “But we have the mind of Christ.” (1 Cor. 2:16) How can that be? It's an old promise, really. It's been around for thousands of years. Jesus said He had come to make it reality in our lives.

“They shall be My people, and I will be their God; and I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear Me always, for their own good and for (the good of) their children after them. I will make an everlasting covenant with them that I will not turn away from them, to do them good; and I will put the fear of Me in their hearts so that they will not turn away from Me.” (Jer. 32:38-40)

Then we'll be able to keep the oldest, greatest commandments of them all: Love God! Love everybody else! Do it with all you've got!

## Living with Real People

It sounds so perfect, this early, excited, on-fire church. There was only one problem with it; they let **people** in! And you know how those humans are. Sure enough, there were problems at least as early as Acts 6 (and no doubt from the very first day, realistically). The thing about humans is that we live in this broken world, disconnected from the God who made us, and therefore by default, disconnected from each other. Every single one of us has been hurt and scarred and damaged. Every one of us gets afraid, angry and sad. We have an almost unconquerable need to protect ourselves, look out for our own interests, get defensive, judge others. The kindest, most loving Christian gets a little sideways from time to time.

When that happens, it's good to remind ourselves where we came from and where we're going, and looking at One Another texts is a great way to start. They are easily found—just go to *Strong's* or another concordance and look up “another.” Look for the letters and books of the New Testament, and watch for places where “another” has “one” in front of it. (Or, in some translations, look for “other” and find places that have “each” before it.) There are way, way too many to go into here, so we'll choose three places, from Romans, Ephesians, and 1 Corinthians.

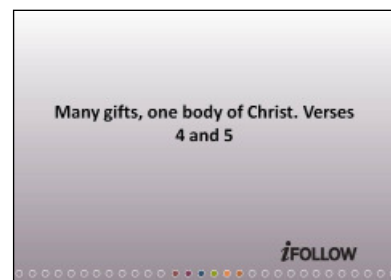
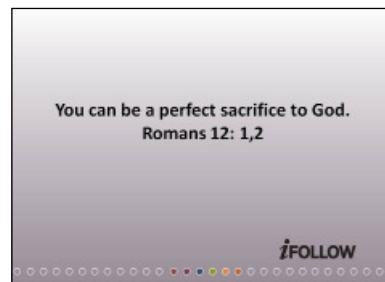
These three were chosen for this unit for a particular reason: they are all right next to spiritual gifts passages. Why should this be so? Paul's fascinating idea seems to be that it is just this endless diversity of gifts that leads to a complete, or whole fellowship.

**“One Another” Passage Number One:** The entire chapter of Romans 12 is devoted to how to be a fellowship of faith. If we were to outline it, it might look something like this:

1. You can be a perfect sacrifice to God. Verses 1 and 2.
2. Start by being humble. Verse 3.
3. We have many gifts, and it takes all of them to be the body of Christ. Verses 4 and 5.
4. Some gifts are listed. Verses 6-8 are most often listed, but 9-13 make an even more complete list of spiritual gifts.
5. Join in the feelings of others, including your enemies, and don't seek revenge. Verses 14-21.

The last half of the chapter in particular, lists specifics about how to treat “one another.” Look for the good, be devoted to one another, give preference, be diligent, rejoice, persevere, pray, give, share hospitality.

**“One Another” Passage Number Two:** Next we will study Ephesians 4. There are hours' worth of subjects for fruitful study and imitation in this little chapter. It would

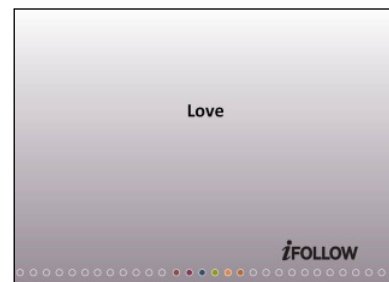


be difficult to even outline it, since there is so much packed into this text that the outline would be nearly as long as the chapter. Let's focus on verses 1-3 and 25-32. This first passage is a beautiful pastoral message from a pastor who has now been many years in the work.

"Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."

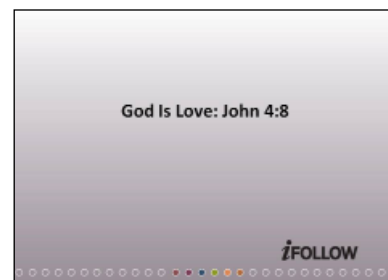
What would happen if, every time a problem came up, as problems inevitably will, each party sat down and read this passage to each other, and prayed through it in detail, before even beginning on the admittedly hard work of actually figuring out what how to resolve their problem? Some problems would disappear like mist in the sunshine. Those which remained would begin to look less threatening if we could really practice looking on each other with humility, gentleness, patience, and tolerance. What if we listened and didn't judge or jump to conclusions? It isn't easy. It wouldn't take diligence to preserve this bond if it were easy. But once we remember the Spirit and seek that loving face, everything seems possible again.

The middle portion of this chapter lists spiritual gifts again, makes the point again that we are one body with one Lord, and says that the only way we'll ever really grow up is in the stumbling exercise of our gifts, exactly the same as a baby stumblingly exercises her body and grows up strong and graceful.



Verses 25-32 read almost like the book of Proverbs. Lay aside falsehood and speak truth with one another. Don't let the sun go down on your anger. Find something for idle hands to do. Don't grieve the Holy Spirit. It would be interesting to make and decorate posters of these. At any rate, we need to have them all posted on the walls of our minds and hearts.

Finally, Paul ends with another loving admonition: "Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you." In other words, we are still human. Forgiveness will still be necessary. But it is there when we need it, always available, to give and to receive. We must never forget that.



**"One Another" Passage Number Three:** Our final example of these texts is found in 1 Corinthians 12. Verses



four through 14 once again list gifts and emphasize the point that these many gifts come from one Spirit and result in one complete body. Verses 14 through 26 make it clear that the Corinthian church was having difficulty with living in loving fellowship. Apparently, people were honoring some gifts above others, leading to controversy, jealousy, and pride. Paul spends a good bit of time talking about how important **all** parts of our bodies are, and how our whole bodies break down if one part is not functioning. At the end of the chapter, verses 27 through 30, Paul lists gifts yet again, and urges his readers to “earnestly desire the greater gifts.”

How strange! Didn't he just get through insisting no gift was greater than another; all were important? Didn't he just say in so many words, in verses 24 and 25, that this diversity of gifts actually **caused** unity, “so that there may be no division in the body”? This seems counterintuitive. If we are to be truly united, the Corinthians might have asked, shouldn't we all have the same gifts and the same jobs to do for God? No, says Paul, just like our physical bodies, our churches need all their different parts, and they need them to work efficiently together, with no one making lists of who's important and who's not. Now he turns around and says, “Earnestly desire the greater gifts.” Then Paul moves into one of the most beloved and celebrated chapters in the Bible, 1 Corinthians 13. What is the greatest gift of all? Paul lays it out clearly in Romans 13:10: “Love does no wrong to a neighbor, therefore love **is** the fulfilling of the law.” (Emphasis supplied.)

Jesus was pretty insistent about it. In His last hours with His disciples, with the weight of the world beginning to make itself felt, He said again and again, “**Love one another!**” Love everybody, love all the time, love as I have loved you. (See John 13:34, 35; 15:12, 17.) This is the only way the world is ever going to even consider buying into this unbelievable story of grace and redemption.

## Evaluating the Quality of Christian Fellowship

How can we know we are succeeding at being the kind of fellowship for which Jesus prayed and gave His life? Does there have to be an influx of 3,000 souls in one day? Well, that might be a good indicator. On the other hand, people in today's instant-gratification culture sometimes jump on bandwagons because it's fun, or everybody's doing it, or the ads were compelling. They have an unnerving tendency to jump off again just as quickly. Here are some questions (based on the Bible principles) we might ask ourselves about the Christian fellowship or congregation we belong to:

1. Do I feel loved here? This isn't as easy a question as it looks at first. Do I **really** feel loved here? No matter how I act or look? Or do I just fit in because it's what I'm used to, and I seem like the others and we're all used to each other?

2. Am I listened to? Do I listen to others?
3. What can I or can't I share here? Would I feel safe telling someone here the secret that has crushed my heart for years?
4. What happens when I sin against someone here?
5. What happens when someone here sins against me?
6. When was the last time we did something completely different? What happens when we get outside our comfort zone?

The answers to these questions, faced with scrupulous honesty by those who are already members of our church, Sabbath School class, Bible study group, prayer group, or other small group, will give us a reasonably good idea of how an outsider might feel coming in. If we aren't satisfied with the answers, there are a lot more "One Another" texts to study. And they all start and end with prayer and love, love and prayer, forgiveness, prayer, and love! "God is love." (John 4:8)

## Handouts in this Package

1. What Does It Mean to be "of One Mind"?
2. Three "One Another" Passages
3. Suggested Evaluation Questions



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## Additional Resources

- Augsburger, David (2006). *Dissident Discipleship: A Spirituality of Self-Surrender, Love of God and Love of Neighbor*. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press.
- Bilezikian, Gilbert (1997). *Community 101: Reclaiming the Local Church as Community of Oneness*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.
- Bonhoeffer, Dietrich (1978). *Life Together*. New York, NY: HarperOne. (The classic exploration of faith in community.)
- Burrill, Russell (1997). *The Revolutionized Church of the 21st Century*. Fallbrook, CA: Hart Books.
- Chittister, Joan (1990). *Wisdom Distilled from the Daily: Living the Rule of St. Benedict Today*. New York, NY: HarperCollins.
- Foster, Richard J. (1978). *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*. New York, NY: HarperSanFrancisco.
- Johnson, Jan, Keith Matthews and Dallas Willard (2001). *Dallas Willard's Study Guide to The Divine Conspiracy*. New York, NY: HarperOne.
- Jones, Tony (2005). *The Sacred Way*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.
- Kuhlman, Delcy (1998). *Experiencing God through Spiritual Mentoring*. Lincoln, NE: Center for Creative Ministry.
- McLaren, Brian D. (2008). *Finding Our Way Again: The Return of the Ancient Practices*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson.
- Nelson, Dwight K. (2001). *The Eleventh Commandment: A Fresh Look at Loving Your Neighbor As Yourself*. Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Publishing Association.
- Ortberg, John (1997). *The Life You've Always Wanted: Spiritual Disciplines for Ordinary People*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.
- Pohl, Christine D. (1999). *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.
- Smith, James Bryan (1993). *A Spiritual Formation Workbook: Small Group Resources for Nurturing Christian Growth*. New York, NY: HarperOne.
- Stassen, Glen H., and David P. Gushee (2003). *Kingdom Ethics: Following Jesus in Contemporary Context*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.
- Whitney, Donald S. (1991). *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*. Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress Publishing Group.

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Willard, Dallas (1990). *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives*. New York, NY: HarperOne.

Willard, Dallas (1998). *The Divine Conspiracy: Discovering Our Hidden Life in God*. New York, NY: HarperSanFrancisco.

Willard, Dallas (2002). *Renovation of the Heart: Putting on the Character of Christ*. Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress.

Wright, N.T. (1994). *Following Jesus: Biblical Reflections on Discipleship*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

## Articles

Serns, Dan (2005). "From Basketball to Bible Studies." *Adventist Review*, January 27, 2005. (An extremely useful and practical description of "How to mobilize your members for ministry." Included here because it emphasizes the importance of partnering and coaching, necessary facets of life in community.)

Webb, Jere (2002). "Standard Features." *Adventist Review*, July 18, 2002. (A story of a retired pastor's search for a church home that would have the features on his "A list," culled from the early church in Acts.)

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## Discussion Questions

1. Why do you think sinfulness and community are so mutually exclusive? Be specific.
2. What are some of the things (good and bad) that the world has learned about community through Abraham's family?
3. What are some specific things we can learn about community from Jesus' life and ministry?
4. Why are unity and diversity so closely connected? Do you know of successful communities which value sameness? Do you know communities which value diversity? In what ways are each successful and unsuccessful?

### An In-depth Group Discussion Idea

Spend some time studying Romans 12:9-18. List as many specific admonitions as the group can find on a white board or flip-chart, and share stories of times when group members have seen these things in action. Look for positive stories, either of times when Christ's love was shown, or times when there was a problem that was resolved because someone showed Christ's love.

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## Group Activities

### Activity 1

*This activity could be done after presenting the section on “God Shows His Own Face” in the Presenter Notes.*

**Purpose:** To dig deeply and discover new insights into Jesus’ prayer for unity in John 17.

**Preparation:** Put this sentence on enough 3x5 cards that each participant may have one to keep: “I do not ask for these alone, but for \_\_\_\_\_, who believes in Me through their word, that they may all be one.” (John 17:20) You will need a board or flipchart and markers. This activity may be done with the group as a whole or in smaller teams; if the latter, you need room for the groups to spread out, as well as flipcharts or posters for each.

**Assignment:** First, pass out the cards and invite each participant to put his or her name into the blank. Then have a minute or two of silent prayer in which each one contemplates and prays over this now personalized sentence. Next, have the group delineate, on a white board or flipchart, each time the word “that” appears in this portion of the prayer. How many times does it appear? Does it vary by Bible version? (key below) What were the specific things Jesus was praying for? Which ones are repeated? Why, do you think? Are they repeated exactly the same, or enlarged upon?

**Time:** Allow five minutes for the personalization of the cards and silent prayer. Use a timer to prevent the silence from being cut to less than at least two minutes by our modern anxiety with silence. Allow 30 minutes for the discussion. If you divide into small groups, also allow 10 minutes for someone from each group to share at the end.

**Key:** There are ten appearances of the word “that” in the NIV:

1. that they themselves also may be sanctified in truth - verse 19
2. that they may all be one, even as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You - verse 21
3. that they also may be in us - verse 21
4. that the world may believe that You sent Me - verse 21
5. that they may be one, just as We are one; I in them and You in Me - verses 22, 23
6. that they may be perfected in unity - verse 23
7. that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me - verse 23
8. that they also, whom You have given Me, be with Me where I am - verse 24
9. that they may see My glory which You have given Me - verse 24
10. that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them - verse 26

## Activity 2

*This activity is most appropriately done at the end of the session.*

**Purpose:** Deep study into the “one another” passages of the Bible.

**Preparation:** This would be a long and intense activity, if it were done all at one time in a group. It would last at least an hour. Alternately, it could be personal study time at home, or assigned one week, to bring back results the next week.

**Assignment:** Give each group member, or allow them to choose, one of the following 13 books of the Bible: 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Colossians, 1 Thessalonians, 1 Timothy, Titus, Hebrews, James, 1 Peter, 1 John and 2 John. Have each person use a concordance to find “one another” passages in these books and share the highlights of what they find.

If there is a large enough group, one could take each book from I Corinthians to Jude. There are 20 books, or one person could take both Peters, and one could take all three Johns, which would reduce it to 17. In the books not mentioned above, there are no specific “one another” passages, but there is instruction on community which can be found with a little research. It would be very interesting to do a long-term study of just these passages, one per week, or whatever the group chooses.

**Time:** If you choose to do this as a group, allow at least an hour, plus time for sharing, but be sure only highlights are shared. It could be useful to have a second session for sharing what is gleaned and what changes participants want to make in their daily lives.

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# Handout 1

## What Does it Mean to be of One Mind?

Look at the following passages. It would be good to read them in context, as well.  
What specific characteristics of like-mindedness can you find?

**Romans 12:16-18**—"Be of the same mind toward one another; do not be haughty in mind, but associate with the lowly. Do not be wise in your own estimation. Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men. If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men."

In this passage, like-mindedness means:

Not \_\_\_\_\_

Not \_\_\_\_\_

Don't \_\_\_\_\_

Respect \_\_\_\_\_

As far as possible \_\_\_\_\_

**Romans 15:6**—"Now may the God who gives perseverance and encouragement grant you to be of the same mind with one another according to Christ Jesus, so that with one accord you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."

In this passage, like-mindedness needs: \_\_\_\_\_ and

\_\_\_\_\_

Its results will be that we may: \_\_\_\_\_

**2 Corinthians 13:11**—"Finally, brethren, rejoice, be made complete, be comforted, be like-minded, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you."

In this passage, like-mindedness means:

Be \_\_\_\_\_

And its results will be \_\_\_\_\_

**Philippians 1:27**—"Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I will hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel; in no way alarmed by your opponents."

In this passage, like-mindedness means:

To stand \_\_\_\_\_

And strive together for \_\_\_\_\_

Why do you think Paul said we would then be “in no way alarmed by our opponents?”

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**Philippians 2:2**—“Make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose.”

In this passage, like-mindedness means:

Maintaining \_\_\_\_\_

United in \_\_\_\_\_

Intent on \_\_\_\_\_

**I Corinthians 2:16**—“But we have the mind of Christ.” How did we get this mind?

“They shall be My people, and I will be their God; and I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear Me always, for their own good and for (the good of) their children after them. I will make an everlasting covenant with them that I will not turn away from them, to do them good; and I will put the fear of Me in their hearts so that they will not turn away from Me.” (Jeremiah. 32:38-40)

In this passage, like-mindedness means:

One \_\_\_\_\_, one \_\_\_\_\_

So we will not \_\_\_\_\_

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## Handout 2

### Three “One Another” Passages

1. Romans 12
2. Ephesians 4
3. 1 Corinthians 12

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## Handout 3

### Evaluation Questions

1. Do I feel loved here? Do I really feel loved here? No matter how I act or look? Or do I just fit in because it's what I'm used to, and I seem like the others and we're all used to each other?
2. Am I listened to? Do I listen to others?
3. What can I or can't I share here? Would I feel safe telling someone here the secret that has crushed my heart for years?
4. What happens when I sin against someone here?
5. What happens when someone here sins against me?
6. When was the last time we did something completely different? What happens when we get outside our comfort zone?

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