

EMBRACING DIVERSITY

Being an inclusive community

There is no adequate substitute for the Biblical concept of fellowshiping - person to person.

Biblical fellowship means meeting together often with people of diverse origins and backgrounds.

There is a need for us to understand the **importance** of coming together and the **empowerment** and **stimulus** that comes from the **simplicity** of fellowship

1. True fellowship is based on more than mere friendship or likeness

2. Fellowship is more than meeting with family and friends

- It is gathering with people who are different; different to us, in culture, ethnicity and temperament.

3. True fellowship is about bonding together because of a mutually shared value of being brethren.

4. Fellowship is also based on a collectively held love for the same Lord – Jesus Christ!

- The fellowship of believers in the new testament as recorded in the book of acts showed that their fellowship consisted of all kinds of people from varied backgrounds and ethnic origins
- Obviously there had to be something in their fellowshiping together that **envigorated** and **energised** them because they delighted to do it every day.
- **Fellowship does empower!**
- Fellowship was meant to be **an enjoyable experience** - enjoying each other's company and they enjoyed being together (They did it daily. They broke bread daily).
- They obviously loved each other and were committed to each other (they shared their possessions etc).

5. God intended that fellowship to be simple and uncomplicated

- It only becomes complicated when we introduce our **partiality** and **preferences** into it.
- The simplicity of gathering together of all kinds of diverse peoples enjoying each other's company is what fellowship was designed to be.

6. Love and acceptance is the fundamental principle of true fellowship.

- Love for one another. That genuinely shows an interest in other persons.
- Love that conveys that you are there for them and not for any other reason.
- A genuine desire to listen and hear other people's story and journey, without wanting something from them.
- Not trying to correct or instruct them.
- Giving love without any expectation of thanks or reciprocal love. (i.e. love returned)

7. Giving is also another factor that is essential in true fellowship

- The giving of **oneself** to others –
- The giving of **time** to hear their special story and journey since finding Christ
- **Empathy** is the key word here!
- **Empathy means:** compassion, sympathy, understanding, identification, fellow feeling.

8. Fellowshiping with diverse peoples sharpens and grows our capacity to love beyond those barriers that once seemed insurmountable.

- **It improves the quality of that love**
- **Jesus said:** *“IF YOU LOVE ONLY THOSE WHO LOVE YOU – what reward is there for that?”*
- Jesus spoke to his disciples about having a quality of love that exceeds and goes beyond the love most people show.
- A quality of love that enables the disciple to love their enemies and **to love like God loves.**

Matthew 5:46-48 (NLT) If you love only those who love you, what reward is there for that? Even corrupt tax collectors do that much. 47: If you are kind only to your friends, how are you different from anyone else? Even pagans do that. 48: But you are to be perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect.

- **Perfect in loving** - i.e. loving as God loves. I.e. loving all peoples
- **God has designed** that meeting together with different kinds of people stretches and improves the **quality of our love**.
- **Loving beyond** our friends and those who love us, but now including those who are different, difficult and sometimes opposing us.
- **Fellowship is the perfect environment** where we learn to **love like God loves, a God-kind of love** that genuinely loves and accepts all of God's creation.

But you are to be perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect. (meaning - **perfect in loving**) - I.E. loving as God loves - loving all peoples