

MATTHEW ALLEN

DISCIPLES DEVOTED TO FELLOWSHIP

The One Another Principle



13 STUDIES • INDIVIDUALS • SMALL GROUPS • CLASSES

Disciples Devoted to Fellowship

The One Another Principle

A Bible Study Workbook by

Matthew Allen

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Introduction

And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved, Acts 2.42–47.

Perhaps there is no better passage that describes the life of the earliest Christians. Their life consisted of:

- a sense of awe and heartfelt unity.
- selling their belongings and taking care of the needs of others.
- assembling together daily.
- breaking bread together at home, with generous hearts.
- praising God.
- having favor with all the people.

For them, Christianity was much more than a once-a-week occurrence. It enveloped every aspect of life. It *was* life! American Christianity struggles with this. We are busy, rich, overworked, and often distracted, which can make us push our spiritual pursuits down the priority list to a mere subsection of life, rather than them *being our life*. With all the pressure of American culture, it is not surprising to see brothers and sisters disconnected from and relating superficially to the rest of their spiritual family.

How can we correct this tendency?

In *Disciples Devoted to Fellowship*, we intend to reinforce these objectives:

- a yearning to be together.
- the development of a servant's heart.

I'm excited you have joined me in this challenging study. To God be the glory!

Matthew Allen

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Lesson 1

Lifting Up One Another

Defining Fellowship

With what is *fellowship* most connected within today's religious world? If you said *food and fun*, you'd be correct. I would suggest to you that this is not a proper connotation of the word. Eating together and enjoying the company of others is a result of what we are seeking to define.

Fellowship is synonymous with these words: *partnership; communion; contribution; joint participation; companionship; sharing; partakers.*¹

Another reference defines *fellowship* in the following way: *Close association involving mutual interests and sharing, association, communion, fellowship, close relationship.*² What do these examinations teach? Each member of the local church is to have a personal and emotional connection with the work that is being conducted and with others inside the congregation who are participating in its various works.

What share do you have in the work of your congregation? Is it just being present at worship services, Bible studies, and making your financial contribution? What kind of fellowship do you have with your congregation in its:

- teaching program? (children or adult)
- evangelistic outreach?
- encouragement of members?
- visitation of one another?
- service to widows and widowers?
- mentorship and encouragement of its youth?

Fellowship is NOT just being at church. It is engaging in partnership with your brothers and sisters in the church. Are you a **spectator** or a **participant**?

A Look at Epaphroditus

Epaphroditus provides Bible students with a great example of *fellowship*. He is identified as a Christian sent by the Philippians to help Paul during a time of need, Philippians 2.25; 4.18.

Understanding who Epaphroditus was, is best understood by seeing him inside his relationship to Paul and the Philippians. Paul uses three significant terms in 2.25 to characterize his bond with him:

- “My brother”—He was one in the faith with Paul.
- “My fellow worker”—He was a colleague of Paul in evangelizing.
- “My fellow soldier”—He struggled side by side with Paul against adversaries of the gospel. *This military metaphor suggests that Epaphroditus experienced suffering and conflict in his ministry.*³

Epaphroditus (in the case of the context of Philippians) served as a minister to Paul’s material needs by bringing him monetary gifts the Philippian church entrusted him with. Notice how Paul describes these gifts in 4.18:

- “A fragrant offering”
- “A sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God”

Epaphroditus completed his mission. Note 2.30: *for he nearly died for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was lacking in your service to me.* Look again at 4.18. What did receipt of these gifts do for Paul? *I have received full payment, and more. I am well supplied ...*

Thinking about Paul’s situation ...

In Philippians 1.12–14, Paul identifies his circumstances and conditions. He was imprisoned. Despite the poor situation, he chose to rejoice, 1.18; 2.17. As you read parts of chapter 4, where Paul focuses on the supplies/money that Epaphroditus brought to him, it is easy to see how he had been uplifted by the actions of the Philippian church. And, not only that, but he had also had the company of Epaphroditus. Having others around during dark times can be a huge source of encouragement.

Lifting Up One Another: How Do We Do it?

Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing, 1 Thessalonians 5.11.

What does this look like?

Esteem others higher. Christians esteem others higher than themselves, Philippians 2.3–4. Have high regards, great respect, and favorable thoughts of the people in your circle of trust and influence. Expect the best from your brothers and sisters.

Be wise in your speech. Communicate more effectively by thinking before you speak. If there is a word that is more appropriate in a conversation, use it. Start with a praise. Never confront others. Instead, point out on how both of you can make things better. Speak at the same level as your audience, giving them due respect. There's no need to come in with an authoritarian voice to get your message heard.

Be encouraging. Encouragement is an expression and assurance of one's hope and future in words, presence, and sincerity.

Be quick to forgive. When others make a mistake, be quick to forgive and forget; releasing them from guilt and shame that may take root in one's heart when not dealt with over time. See Colossians 3.12–14.

Be understanding. Wisdom and understanding go hand in hand. Understanding starts by being an active listener (not planning a reply as one is speaking), asking intelligent questions to gain further insight, and being accepting of what the speaker is sharing. Then, answer without condemning. Or don't answer at all and decide to just be a listening ear.

Zero gossip. Keep others' secrets. Never speak stuff that causes unnecessary hurt to others by speaking unclaimed rumors behind their back.

Share knowledge. Found an article or book that's useful? Share it with your friends. Sharing knowledge helps us learn, discover, and understand things that are interesting. They have immediate application for better results in our work and life. They edify our soul and improve our daily conversations.

Stay humble. Humility and maturity are synonymous. A dignified person accomplishes much, but brags little. They are secure in their standing without needing to make noise, often treating everyone with tremendous respect, regardless of position.

Be positive! Positive thinking goes beyond having the drive and motivation for personal success. Positive thinking is explicit, definite, and outspoken. It's contagious. Build up your loved ones with your positiveness, allowing them to be open for better things to come.

Love. *Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails . . . And now these three remain: faith, hope, and love. But the greatest of these is love,* 1 Corinthians 13, NIV. Care for your loved ones how you would want to be cared for. Build up one another how you would like to be inspired.⁴

For Thought and Reflection

1. What is the most common connotation for *fellowship* in today's religious world? Does this connect with how the word is used in the New Testament? Explain.
2. What does *fellowship* mean, when speaking of how it is used in the New Testament?
3. How is Epaphroditus a great example of *fellowship* in action?
4. In what ways had he uplifted Paul?
5. What was Paul's situation as he wrote the letter to the Philippians?
6. Why is *building up* or *uplifting* others so important?
7. When examining ten things that can help build up others, why do you think we start with *respect*? How much respect do you see in the society around us?

8. How can improving one's communication skills help in the uplifting of others?

9. Why can gossip be so discouraging?

10. Why is positive thinking and positive attitude so important?

11. Besides 1 Corinthians 13, can you think of any other passages that instruct us on putting love in action?

12. How has today's lesson helped you as you think about the relationships inside our congregation?

13. What are some things you can do this week to uplift others within the spiritual family you are part of?

Exhorting One Another

Introduction

One of our greatest challenges may be to view our spiritual family in the special way Scripture calls for. Referring to your congregation as a *family* is not just a catchphrase. It should be a growing reality inside your life in every sense of the word. You are not alone in your journey to heaven. If you've been blessed to have physical family that are Christians, that's great. But along with them, you have God's family—made up of people with different experiences, maturity levels, personalities, and talents. All of these make up the group of people that will journey with you to the goal—eternal life with God in heaven.

It is important to see the spiritual family for the blessing that it is. And it is equally important that to understand the great need to be a part of it by serving, encouraging, and exhorting others. Those who limit their interaction with the family will limit their potential for spiritual growth. They will also neglect the admonition in Hebrews 10.24 that instructs Christians to *consider how to stir up one another to love and good works*.

This lesson focuses on *exhorting one another*. Perhaps the first place we think of this is 2 Timothy 4.2: *Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching*.

Exhort carries along the idea of encouragement, but with the idea of some force behind it. We don't use the word *exhortation* very much today but when you were little and heading out the door on a freezing cold day, maybe your mother made an exhortation for you to put on your hat and zip up your coat! Exhortation is to urge by a strong, often stirring argument, admonition, advice, or appeal.⁵

Parakaleō

This is the Greek word for *exhort* in 2 Timothy 4.2. Here are some general definitions for this word:

- To ask to come and be present where the speaker is, *call to one's side*.
- To urge strongly, *appeal to, urge, encourage*.
- Impress upon someone.

- To make a strong request for something, request, implore, entreat.
- To instill someone with courage or cheer, comfort, encourage, cheer up.⁶

The way the word should be used is determined by the context. In the 2 Timothy context, the word is associated with “admonishment,” “encouragement of those who obey,” “appealing to,” and *telling them what they ought to do*.⁷ In other places, the same word is translated “urge,” such as in 1 Timothy 1.3; 2.1; 4.13; and 6.2.⁸ The word was also used in military contexts for the encouragement of soldiers.⁹

Going back to our text, Paul moves from the negative to the positive in explaining the role of the preacher. To *reprove* someone involves giving them reason to understand that something is wrong in their life. To *rebuke* someone is to convict them that they have done that thing. The word *exhort* is transitional in that Paul is moving out of the negative to the positive which is *patience* and *teaching*. The preacher confronts their sin and then encourages them out of it. He comes alongside after having confronted them to encourage them to take the steps to change.¹⁰

How is it done?

The simple answer is found in 1 Thessalonians 2.11–12: *For you know how, like a father with his children, we exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you to walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory*. Think how a father plays an important role with his children, leading and guiding them, and correcting them. The idea is that the exhortation is done with a spirit of love, care, and concern.

Glen Pease in his writing on *The Gift of Exhortation*, points out that the first four letters of the Greek word for “exhort” are *para*, from which we get parallel lines that run alongside each other. He says, “the true exhorter is one who does not rub you the wrong way because he is not trying to cross you, but to run parallel with you.”¹¹ This is the person that comes along side us to be a comfort and companion. Even if this person has to communicate that you are wrong, they do so in love and out of concern. Their goal is to help and encourage you to be your best.

It has been said that *a person has made a step toward genuine maturity when he or she realizes the greatest gift they can provide others consists in being a radiant and encouraging person*.¹² Obtaining this gift can certainly be a challenge. There may be times where we tend to be judgmental, and our advice will turn people off. Edward Steichen became one of the world’s greatest photographers because his mother was an encourager. When Edward took his first pictures, only 1 out of 50 were half-way decent. His father told him to put away the camera and try another hobby. That was his exhortation,

but his mother took another approach. She said that the one picture of his sister at the piano more than made up for the other 49. She encouraged him to try again and not let failure stop him. *Her encouragement was the beginning of the climb to the top.* “History is filled with examples of how one person’s encouraging word or action motivates another to press on to victory.”¹³

You can help someone advance in their walk with God

Read Exodus 18.1–24. Here we are introduced to Jethro, Moses’ father-in-law. One of Moses’ jobs was to judge the people in disputes and other matters. Note specifically 18.13: *The next day Moses sat to judge the people, and the people stood around Moses from morning till evening.*

Now, carefully read 18.14–17 and see how Jethro exhorted Moses. *What you are doing is not good,* 18.17. Then, note the angle that he approaches Moses with. It is not with a spirit of condemnation or charging him with ignorance, but from genuine concern: *You and the people with you will certainly wear yourselves out, for the thing is too heavy for you. You are not able to do it alone,* 18.18. As you read the remaining verses, Jethro advises Moses to set up a court system. This exhortation not only helped Moses, but it helped everyone in Israel.

Those who are gifted in exhortation **do not just judge what is wrong, but they also have a helpful answer as to how to set it right.** *The gifted exhorter can give counsel that moves people to actions that solve problems.* This is the person who helps:

- turn words into action.
- prayers be answered.
- vision move toward accomplishment.

Conclusion

It takes work and plenty of forethought and prayer to be an exhorter. It is not something that a person can rush into with little thought. There needs to be a plan and a purpose. Words need to be carefully chosen. The timing needs to be right. Assurances need to be given that failure doesn’t have to be the end. We can all become better exhorters and encouragers. Are you willing to do the work it takes to do this effectively?

For Thought and Reflection

1. Read Hebrews 10.24. What is the goal behind stirring up others? How effective are you in this work?
2. Reread the definitions for exhort that are listed on pages 7–8. What definition do you think best fits the context of 2 Timothy 4.2?
3. Think of a time when you received exhortation. What are your feelings toward the person who came alongside you to help? How can you use that experience to further your own methods of exhortation?
4. How does 1 Thessalonians 2.11–12 help us to understand how exhortation is to be given?
5. How strongly do you value the companionship of others in your spiritual walk? How does it fit inside the area of exhortation?
6. Why is it so important to be defined as an encouraging person?
7. How has the encouragement of someone else helped you go to the next level of spiritual living? Where would you be without it? Explain.

8. What lessons can we learn about Jethro's exhortation to Moses?

9. What type of planning needs to be given before we decide to exhort someone:
 - a. In our attitude toward the other person:

 - b. In understanding the problem they're confronting:

 - c. In the words we choose:

 - d. In the solutions we provide:

10. Why is timing an important consideration as we think about how to exhort someone?

11. How can today's lesson help you head toward spiritual maturity?