



WEEK 2

WEEK 2: DAY 1 Fellowship – Part 1

By: Pastor Mark Jones

Scripture: Acts 2:42

*42 They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching **and to fellowship**, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.*

As we begin our second week in this 21-Day Prayer Journey, the next spiritual discipline is “fellowship.”

If you were to survey Christians what the word “fellowship” means to them, probably the vast majority would answer it as: “Oh, you mean my relationship with other Christians in the Church?”

A good number of these might even quote Hebrews 10:25: *“25 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.”*

By all means, the Church, and the fellowship we have with other Christians is a huge, necessary part of understanding the word, “fellowship.” However, there is a second way to think of fellowship, and **that's the fellowship we have with the Lord Himself!**

We get our English word “Fellowship” from the Greek word “Koinoinia.” The key idea with Koinoinia is “communion” or a “close sharing” **that takes place in the context of a relationship.**

In the New Testament, we see two different ways in how Koinoinia is used. Think in terms of two dimensions for this word: vertical (our relationship with the Lord) and horizontal (our relationship with other Believers.)

So, let's begin this second week by looking at the “Vertical” dimension of this special word, “Koinoinia.” The apostle Paul writes in I Corinthians 1:9:

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

Also, think of Revelation 3:20 where John records the words, *“20 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.”*

Do we truly realize that the King of kings, and Lord of lords **called us** so we could have an eternal relationship with Him?

Jesus reached out to us, and invited us to have a special relationship with Him. When we choose to open our lives to His invitation, He comes Into our lives and **is now with us.**

That's how special you are!

God views each of us as a person of such incredible worth and value that His Son Jesus would willingly pay his life as the penalty for all our sin!

When you accepted Christ into your heart, you were “birthed” into a Royal family...God's family! You are a Child of the King! Let that truly sink in. God delights in you, your life as it's lived for Him, the praise and worship you offer Him, and...the time you spend with Him in prayer?

Let me ask you this question. How does a person develop or cultivate a relationship?

It's through spending time talking with that person; both you sharing your heart so they get to know you, and you listening to the other person to get to know them.

Have you noticed how a young couple, newly in love, talks to one another? Everything around them becomes invisible because they “tune in” to each other – that's their sole focus! The only thing before their attention is the other person.

In the same way, God desires us to look forward to our time we spend with Him. The question is... Do we? Do we actually look forward to having conversations with Him? Do we “hunger” to hear His thoughts spoken into our lives, just as a young couple in love hungers to hear the other

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person's voice? In other words, a key part of this conversational dynamic is learning what it means to "wait upon the Lord" so that we can hear Him speak His thoughts into our mind.

It's an amazing thought to realize that the Creator of the Universe **delights in hearing from us as well as speaking to us**. Take full advantage in cultivating this love relationship with The King! He is the source of a never-ending stream of words of love, encouragement, and affirmation. Wrap yourself in His love, and a key way you connect to His life-giving presence is your prayer life!

If you've never thought about your prayer life in this way, maybe these 21 days will help you see your prayer life in a new way: to discover an amazing source of infinite love, ready to be poured out upon your life! Everyone needs encouragement, and our

loving Lord knows what you need before you do, And, He wants to supply what you need according to His riches in glory.

So, longingly and lovingly enter your prayer time with the thought Jesus wants to speak encouragement and affirmation into your being, and supply exactly what you need!

Tomorrow, we'll take a look at the depth of intimacy that God wants with us, but for now, know that you have been **Called Into Fellowship with Jesus... the Creator of the Universe!** He infinitely loves you and wants His best for you! With so much love just waiting to be encountered, that's something worth praying about.

So, let's pray for a deeper relationship with the King, our King Jesus!

PRAYER:

Dear God,

Thank you for desiring to have a close, loving relationship with me! May I never take for granted that the Creator of the Universe desires to fully know who I am! Thank you for pursuing me, loving me, and having a relationship with me. Help me to discover all that is available for me to experience (to share) in our relationship. Help me to put You in Your rightful place in my life. Help me to understand and see that as I pursue the Vertical dimension of Fellowship, it will bless and impact how I love others along the Horizontal dimension. Lord, teach me and show me Your amazing love, that I might love others as You've loved me. Thank you for my spouse, my family, my Church family, my friends and all those I have the privilege in knowing. Help empower me to love them, as You have loved me!

In Jesus's Name I pray...

AMEN!

WEEK 2: DAY 2 Fellowship – Part 2

By: Pastor Mark Jones

Scripture: Acts 2:42

*42 They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching **and to fellowship**, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.*

Yesterday we began looking at the “Vertical” dimension of the word “Fellowship,” and that is, the close, love relationship the Lord wants with us. Do you realize Jesus will love you with a love that never fails! He desires to encourage, affirm, and empower you to be and do everything that He has created you to fulfill! You have no better cheerleader in life than Him! That’s the kind of love Jesus desires to “pour out” of His heart to You!

To help us get a better picture of the type of intimacy God desires with us in our “Fellowship” with Him, let’s look at Ephesians 5:31-32:

“31 For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and shall be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.32 This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church.”

The most intimate, close “Fellowship” a person will ever experience between people is that of a man and woman coming together in marriage. Paul speaks of a “mystery” regarding the process in which a man and woman become close to one another; and then, he uses that picture for one last powerful thought: he compares the closeness these 2 people experience in marriage to the closeness or “Fellowship” God wants with us!

Take some time to ponder that thought: our Lord Jesus, the Creator of the Universe, wants an intimately close “Fellowship” with you and me! Think about every aspect of who you are, all your faults, weaknesses, vulnerabilities; and yet, the Lord wants to pursue an intensely intimate and loving relationship *with you!*

With this being true, how do we then grow and pursue Him and His love for us?

Glad you asked!

One way is by praising Him privately and when we come together as a Church.

Psalm 22:26 says:

*“The afflicted will eat and be satisfied; **Those who seek Him will praise the Lord.** Let your heart live forever!”*

One of the ways we discover a greater understanding of Who He is, is by praising Him! If you wish to “seek Him” in a more intimate way, then develop your praise life. I recommend three things to think of when praising the Lord. Praise Him for...

- 1) Who He Is
- 2) What He Has Done
- 3) and What He Will Continue to Do!

There are so many great studies about the Names of God, and what each Name means which gives you a better picture of the loving God you serve. That’s what seeking and discovering “Who He Is” is all about.

Let’s go back to yesterday’s picture of a couple newly in love. A key part of their relationship is the motivational drive to get to know the other person better. We need to show God we’re serious about wanting to get to know Him better; like the Psalmist wrote, *“As the deer panteth for the waters, so my Soul Longs For You!”* (Psalm 42:1)

So, in both your prayer time and your praise life, pursue Him. Love Him with your words in prayer and your appreciation in praise!

The second idea is to praise Him for “What He Has Done.” Most notably, this is about what Jesus, and only Jesus did for us – He paid our penalty of

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sin at the Cross. In doing so, an infinite number of amazing things opened up to us: forgiveness of sin, the presence of the Holy Spirit living inside of us, growing in Christ-likeness, participating in His Sovereign plan, and eternal life in heaven to name a few. “O for a Thousand Tongues to Sing” of all the reasons why we should praise Him is probably what the composer had in mind when he wrote those words.

So, praise Him passionately for all He’s done!

Finally, praising Him for “What He Will Continue to Do” is about the Lord “supplying all our needs according to His riches in glory.” (Phil. 4:19) Songs both from the past “Great Is Thy Faithfulness” and “Do It Again” (Song by Elevation Worship) talk about God’s faithfulness in supplying what is needed.

Think for a moment...about past answered prayer. Reflect on those past situations where you had some pressing need, and God was right there supplying what was needed. Let these memories inspire you to realize God will continue to be with you **AND** supply what is needed in the days ahead.

So, the next time you face some type of challenge, view it this way. Look at it as your opportunity to once again see how faithful He is by supplying what is needed. Have you noticed that when all is “said and done,” He has a way of doing it in a perfectly timed way? We might think He’s slow or late to the party, *but He never is!*

Today, aspire to both pray and praise the Lord as you seek toward getting to know Him better!

PRAYER:

Dear God,

How can I begin to thank you enough, for loving me so much that you want to have a close relationship with me, like that of a man & woman in marriage! Lord, help me to see myself as Your “Bride of Christ” the Bible says that I am. Whatever lies have been sown into my life that are seeking to “steal, kill, and destroy” this image from my perspective, In Jesus’ Name” remove those lies! Help me to see myself the way you do! Lord, I praise and exalt You as the ultimate Love of my Life! Come and take “first place” in my heart. Help me to fully explore this “mystery” of growing closer to you. Thank you for loving me, saving me, and opening up my eyes to see there is so much more to experience in You! Lord, thank You for being a faithful, loving God...that’s Who You Are! Thank You for paying the penalty of my sin...that’s What You Did! And Thank You in advance for continuing to be with me, continuing to supply exactly what is needed in Your perfect timing...that’s What You Will Continue to Do! I’m so blessed by You in so many ways! May the fullness of Your life and love in me be realized to the Praise of Your Almighty, Powerful, and Loving Name...

AMEN!

WEEK 2: DAY 3 Fellowship – Part 3

By: Pastor Mark Jones

Scripture: Acts 2:42

*42 They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching **and to fellowship**, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.*

For the past two days, and for today, we've been exploring the "Vertical" dimension of the Word Koinoinia or "Fellowship." We've looked at how our Lord loves us with a love that never fails; and we also explored the picture of marriage to show us how intimate and close the Lord wants to become with us. We finished that devotional with a look at our response to that love: to praise Him in three specific ways.

But today, we might be wondering "How exactly does His love come into our lives?"

The Apostle Paul wrote in Romans 5:5:

"And hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us."

We're told through Paul's writings that we're supplied with this love by the Spirit of God who now lives in us. To better understand this, it helps me to imagine some electrical device with a cord that is "plugged in" to the wall. Electricity flows through that "connection" and that device is able to do what it was designed and built to accomplish.

Here's a key point.

That device cannot generate electricity to make itself work. Instead, that device is dependent upon "making a connection" to an external power source to "supply" electricity in order that it might function.

In the same way, we need to realize that we cannot "generate" the "love of God" within our hearts that we are then able to love other people. Only the Holy Spirit "supplies" God's love to us, **so that**, we are able to then **love one another with God's Love!**

Not that we needed it, but here's another reason to appreciate our Lord Jesus, and be grateful for the "time" we live in...meaning, we live in the days after

Pentecost, where God's Spirit was poured out upon mankind.

How does that apply here? Well, "loving" one another has been a command God has given His people for a very long time.

Leviticus 19:8 records:

"18 You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the sons of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the Lord."

As you can see, the command and directive to love one another has been around for a long time, but how successful was mankind in loving one another? If we're honest...not very well.

So, what makes things different now?

Look at what the Apostle John writes in John 13:34:

"34 A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another."

In the Old Testament passage, the word for love is "Aheb." The critical idea to grab hold of is this: Aheb was the love that man was able to generate, and love his neighbor with. Sadly, this love was imperfect and did not bring about the results God desired.

Then, Jesus came and said something both old and new. He used the same Old Testament idea (gave us a command to follow – "to love your neighbor as yourself"), but He now said something different: we're to love one another **"As I Have Loved You!"**

This is where we're introduced to the new word, "Agape" or "God's Love." No longer are we to love one another with "Aheb", the love we generate and give to each other, because as history has shown us,

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this type of love didn't accomplish God's will. Instead, we are to now love one another with God's Love, "Agape", ***which He supplies to us by the Holy Spirit who now lives in us.***

So, tap into the presence and power of God's Love that is waiting to be poured out into your life that you might love those around you in a way that will shock you and them! Imagine being empowered to "love the unlovable!" You know, that difficult neighbor, or co-worker who drives you nuts. Imagine being able to love *That Person!* We can't do this in our own ability to love one another (aheb), but through God's love (agape) working in and through us...***We Can!***

Pray and ask that God might help you to discover how His love can be experienced by you in an ongoing way. My heart's conviction is that God will

never disappoint His children when they honestly, fervently, and persistently seek Him and His love. He will reward those who diligently seek Him, and perhaps one of the greatest ways we are rewarded is to both experience His love firsthand, and then love those we are in contact with...to the degree that they see Him coming through our actions, and not us!

What could happen to our Church, Community, and Country if we became "living conduits" of His love?

So, let's spend time with the Lord in prayer, that we might become that "living conduit" of His love. Let's show our community what this looks like that God would be glorified, and that people would want what we have...their own relationship with the Lord!

PRAYER:

Dear God,

It's hard to know how to say "Thank You" for loving me with a love I don't fully understand, but help me to experience it more and more. Help me to discover how Your Love is poured out to me through the Holy Spirit. I have a desire to love others, but Your Word shows me I don't have the ability to pull this off; only Your Love flowing through me will enable me to do this. So, let Your Love pour out upon my life that I might be a blessing to many. Help me to see the hurting lives around me that they may experience Your love through me. Help me to see the incredible blessing that awaits them and me as I live with Your Love working through my life! Thank you for giving me the privilege to love like this, a love that can change a person's perspective and help them see You! May Your Love be poured out upon my life, my spouse's life, my family, my Church family that we might impact our Community, Country, and beyond to the Praise of Your Almighty Name, the Name of Jesus,

AMEN!

WEEK 2: DAY 4 Fellowship – Part 4

By: Pastor Mark Jones

Scripture: Acts 2:42

42 They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching **and to fellowship**, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

As we continue our Journey through the idea of “Fellowship,” let’s look at how the connection between the “Vertical” dimension impacts the “Horizontal” dimension. So, ask yourself this question:

“Do I live my life as if Jesus is right there with me in all that I do throughout the day?

Or, do I live my life without really regarding Him as being present in what I do?

Remember from yesterday, we looked at the idea that the most amazing love we’ll ever experience stands right before us: you and I are **Called Into Fellowship with God’s Son Jesus!**

What should this mean to us?

It means we need to start living our lives realizing that Jesus is Right There With Us in everything we say, think, and do. If we really care about His perspective about how we’re living, then we’ll take the time to learn from His Word how He wants us to live. And...He makes it pretty clear especially how we’re to get along with one another.

So be honest with yourself, how does your life speak to the fact that you’re in a close relationship with the Lord? Do people see “Christ-likeness” coming through every part of your life, or do they see something else?

Bear this in mind, when you and I accepted Jesus into our lives, **we now wear His Name!** We’re called “Christians” which means “Followers of Christ.” We have chosen to identify ourselves as **“in a relationship”** with Jesus, and whether we realize it or not, **we now represent Him to others.**

Let’s go back to I Corinthians 1, and pick up with verse 10 & 11 to give us “practical application” on being “Called into Fellowship with the Lord,” and

how that should impact how we live our lives with one another.

“10 Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all [e]agree and that there be no [f]divisions among you, but that you be [g]made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment. 11 For I have been informed concerning you, my brethren, by Chloe’s people, that there are quarrels among you.”

Do you see how this verse connects the Vertical dimension of Koinoinia with the Horizontal? Verse 9 speaks of our being called into “fellowship with God’s Son” and immediately in verse 10 & 11, Paul exhorts the Corinthian Christians to get along – to stop arguing so that they don’t become divided!

We need to realize that as we develop our “Koinoinia” or “communion” with the Lord (the Vertical), the fellowship we have with one another (the Horizontal) is positively impacted!

The Bible speaks to the fact that IF we’re living correctly in our relationship with the Lord, THEN we should experience the result of healthy relationships with one another. Bear in mind, what empowers us to live in unity with one another is the “love of God” that is poured out to us through the Holy Spirit. (We looked at this idea yesterday.)

So, if our Horizontal relationships are not healthy, it speaks to the fact that something in our Vertical relationship needs attention. Something is either blocking the love of God coming to you or through you.

So, how are you doing?

Are you living in right relationships with other Believers? Or do you find yourself in a continued

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place of disagreement and contention? If the latter, then maybe God is saying to you... you need to focus on your fellowship with the Lord first! He wants you to rediscover some critical elements of Him and His life for you. Namely, He wants you to rediscover God's love and how it will impact every area of your life, so that you might love your fellow Believers again!

Have you ever wondered how many Christians have been divided one from the other for various reasons? There's no shortage of reasons why we can easily be

divided from one another, but *Here's the Key thing* we need to have in mind – **God calls us to live in unity!**

Here's the final takeaway from today's devotion: God doesn't leave us to our own ability to live in unity...**He pours out His Love upon us through the Holy Spirit to do it!**

So, "plug into" the power of God's love through prayer.

PRAYER:

Dear God,

Your Word challenges me to live in unity with my fellow brothers and sisters in Christ.

(If this applies...) Lord, I confess my sin of allowing myself to become divided from my brothers and sisters. I ask your forgiveness, and where it applies, help me to apologize to those I have offended that I might walk in a right relationship with them.

Help me to see how my relationship with You is designed to "spill over" into my relationships with others. Let the power of Your Love flow through the Holy Spirit who is in me, that I might love those around me. May those closest to me, see more and more of You shining through my life, my actions, and my words. Help me to "well wear" Your Name into each situation I'm placed.

God thank You for opportunities to grow and do life together with my brothers and sisters in Christ. May I take full advantage of being a part of a local Church, and be a unifying agent within it.

Open my eyes to seeing what You would have me do differently that I may serve You well today. Empower me with Your Love in all I think, say, and do to the Praise of Your Name,

AMEN!

WEEK 2: DAY 5 Fellowship – Part 5

By: Pastor Mark Jones

Scripture: Acts 2:42

*42 They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching **and to fellowship**, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.*

If you go back to the first day of this second week, I shared the verse most people think of when we think of “Fellowship,” and that’s Hebrews 10:25 which says:

“25 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.”

How important is encouragement to you? Have you had someone speak a key word of encouragement to you at a critical moment? How did you feel in hearing their comment, and if you were going through a difficult situation at the time, how did that encouraging word help you make it through?

Encouragement doesn’t happen if we live life separately. It happens as we “assemble together,” and “share” our lives together. The Writer of Hebrews specifically mentions that a key purpose for meeting together is to *encourage one another!*

Look at these three definitions for encouragement:

- 1) the action of giving someone support, confidence, or hope
- 2) persuasion to do or to continue something
- 3) the act of trying to stimulate the development of an activity, statement, or belief.

How many times have you been in need of support, confidence, or hope? Or have you ever wanted to quit because you were so beaten down, but someone “encouraged” you by “persuading” you to “keep on keeping on?”

What was the outcome as you “hung in there” and persevered through? And finally, how helpful was it when someone “coached you up” to motivate you to strive through the pain and work harder in order to see something emerge that would only happen as you journeyed through the pain and difficulty?

Anyone can start something, but finishing is a whole different story.

Life can hit us hard, even knock us down to the point of wanting to quit; but in that moment of desperation, God brings us something we need...

a perfectly timed word of encouragement from a fellow brother or sister in Christ.

What if today, God wants to use **you** to encourage someone who is at the end of their rope? So, how will you know when an opportunity stands before you?

Pray!

Pray that God would open your eyes and ears that you would not miss His opportunity to use you to bless someone else. Imagine the kind of Church or Community we could have if Christians everywhere lived with this kind of intentional living? You never know how a well-timed word of encouragement could impact not only the people of that moment, but somehow, that encouragement could serve as a source of encouragement for many, many more.

Take the example of Eric Liddell. Does the name ring a bell? He was the British runner that the movie “Chariots of Fire” made famous. Eric’s specialty in running was the 100 meters. However, the finals for the 100 meters was on Sunday, and due to his conviction of God’s Word pertaining to the Sabbath as a day of rest, he pulled his name out of contention. Instead, he would put himself into the 400 meters race, a very different race than the 100!

Moments before he would run that final race, an American gave him a note which said, “*Those who honor Me, I will honor.*” I Samuel 2:30.

Eric went on to not only win the race, but set a

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new world record with a time of 47.6 seconds! It's hard to imagine all the thoughts going through Eric's mind leading up to that race. The 400 meters race is very different in its approach than the 100, and *right before the race*, God prompts a person from an opposing team to hand him a word of encouragement. Whose to say how that "word of encouragement" impacted the outcome of that race.

You and I might not be in a position to encourage someone to win a Gold Medal, but maybe we are positioned to encourage someone with a word that will impact not only their life, but many, many more.

So, pray for your "radar" to be up and running, and watch for God to open a door to speak a word of encouragement through you!

PRAYER:

Dear God,

Thank You for all the encouragement you've given me through the years. Lord, help me to see how the power of my words can greatly help and impact someone. Open my eyes to the opportunities that are always around me. Help me not to miss the chance to speak words of encouragement and life to another person. God, I ask that by the power of Your Spirit that lives in me, for You to place the exact words in my mouth that will be a blessing to that person.

God, I thank you for the Church, for it's my extended family. Empower my speech that the words I write, post, and speak would bring life, encouragement, and blessing to those who encounter it. May the power of Your love cover and empower the encouragement that pours out from my life to the praise of Your Almighty Name...

AMEN!

WEEK 2: DAY 6 Fellowship – Part 6

By: Pastor Mark Jones

Scripture: Acts 2:42

42 They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching **and to fellowship**, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

At some point in your life if you haven't already experienced it, you will face the loss of a family member or close friend. Grieving the loss of someone you knew is a painful journey no one wants to make, but we all have to endure this difficult stage of life.

Having a church family is part of God's comfort to you in these times.

Listen to the words of Paul from II Corinthians 1:3-4:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction so that we will be able to comfort those who are in [b]any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.

Notice again this verse has both a "Vertical" and "Horizontal" dynamic taking place. First, we see that "the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction" is a statement letting us know the source of comfort...it's God! That's the "Vertical" dimension of our relationship once again providing us with what we need.

But it doesn't stop there; there is also an expected "Horizontal" dimension too. After telling us the source of our comfort (which is God), the verse continues with "So that we will be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort which we ourselves are comforted by God."

God expects us to continue the cycle of comfort by "being there" and giving the same comfort we received from Him, and give it to those who are grieving from our church family!

This is a very special part of the fellowship of God's family: being there for someone when they are hurting the most, and quite possibly, the loss of a

loved one is the hardest thing to live through.

I will never forget as a young man, it was the summer before my Senior year of High School, and after coming back from my lunch break, in the breakroom over the radio (they did this kind of thing back then) the announcer gave the name of one of my best friends as having been involved in an automobile accident the night before and was pronounced dead at the scene.

I was in absolute shock.

You see, I and two others had spent the night with my friend at my house eating pizza and playing games. After I dropped her and her boyfriend off at her house, she would eventually drive him home. On her way back home, a 16-year-old youth from a different state was drunk, ran a red light, hit her car, and killed my close friend.

I was devastated.

How could something like this happen? WHY did something like this happen? In my searching, somewhere along the line, a friend gave me a piece of paper with one simple verse on it...Psalm 34:18 which says:

*The Lord is near to the brokenhearted
And saves those who are [d]crushed in spirit.*

That was me...I was literally "crushed in spirit." I clung to that scripture for the longest time. It would take a decent amount of time to pass by before I got over her death, but by God's grace, the encouragement of family and friends, and the prayers of those close to me....I did.

If you've experienced that kind of gut-wrenching loss, first let me say, "I'm so sorry!" You feel that the hurt you're experiencing will never go away, but it

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does fade over time. As one pastor said, “**You may not get over this, but you will get through this.**” I’ve seen that...the “getting through” the pain of loss.

Remember two things about this idea: “You’re never alone.”

1) God is right there with you during this time, and He’s closer now to you than ever before. He IS close to those whose hearts are breaking. So share with Him all that you’re thinking and feeling, *for He **will help** you!*

2) Hopefully you are a part of a Church family. Let the fellowship of God’s people bring you the comfort of God they experienced, and can now comfort you. At some future point, you will find yourself in a position to minister to someone else who is hurting, maybe even in the exact same way as you once did, and You, of all people, will be the best one to minister God’s comfort to them!

So, as we pray today, there are two ways to pray...

1) First, if you are in need of comfort, seek the Lord’s presence and allow Him to wrap His loving arms around you, giving you His comfort, grace, mercy, and strength to endure the darkness of that moment.

Or 2) Pray that God would show you someone He needs you to bring the comfort He’s already given you to that person. You are the one He wants to bless someone else through! Think of that...you can be a powerful blessing to someone who is hurting, and maybe, hurting very deeply.

Let the Lord either bring His healing comfort into your life, or through your life to someone else that the Fellowship of the Body would be strengthened.

PRAYER (for those who are grieving):

Dear God,

Only You know how badly I’m hurting right now. God, I pray that you would take away this pain that seems so unbearable. Help me to believe that good times and happy days are ahead of me yet. Empower me with Your comfort that my thoughts might take me in a good direction and not one that sinks into depression. May the power of Your Spirit that is within me give me the boost I need to see things with a positive perspective. I place the pain in my heart into Your hands, O Lord, and ask that you would come and heal my crushed spirit. God, I need You now more than ever before, and I thank You that You are nearer to me than at any other time. Help me to feel Your presence in a reassuring way. Thank You for loving me so deeply. Protect my thoughts that they would be helpful in the grieving process. Thank You for my friend/family member’s life. May You show me something from their life, some trait, that if I did it, would serve as a “Living Legacy” of them and their influence upon my life. Help me to honor them in that way. May all that I do bring honor and glory to Your Name. I surrender my heart, emotions, and thoughts to You that You might bring healing into my life. I ask all of this in Jesus’ Almighty Name...

AMEN!

PRAYER (for those who can bring God’s comfort to someone else):

Dear God,

I thank You for how You have provided for me in the past exactly what I needed when I was grieving and

WEEK 2: DAY 6 Fellowship – Part 6

going through the pain of loss. Thank You for all that You did for me. Help me to keep my eyes and ears open that I might be ready to minister the same comfort You gave me to someone in need.

God, forgive me if I've been absorbed in the busyness of my life, and I've missed out on being an agent of Your comfort. Help me to always be alert and tuned into those people who live life with me. May I be a source of encouragement and comfort to them when they are in need. So God, help me know when Your comfort is needed, especially, if there is that situation where my friend or family member doesn't say a word to anyone. God, may the power of Your Holy Spirit that is inside of me give me the irresistible prompt that something is not right with a person I know that I might proactively reach out to them, and bring them Your life, love, encouragement, and comfort. God, You are the God of ALL Comfort. Help me to not miss Your Spirit's prompt if there is a person experiencing some "private pain" that no one knows but You. Somehow, may Your Spirit put that person's name on my heart, and then, guide me in knowing what You would have me do to bring Your comfort to their life.

God, thank You for my Church family, and may I be a blessing to someone as You have blessed me in so many ways to the praise of Your Name,

AMEN!

WEEK 2: DAY 7 Fellowship – Part 7

By: Pastor Mark Jones

Scripture: Acts 2:42

*42 They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching **and to fellowship**, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.*

As we finish up our second week in this journey, the devotional thought for today covers what might be one of the greatest challenges in the church today: the viral disease of criticism.

Before we explore more, let's look at Ephesians 4:29-32:

“Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear. 30 Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. 31 Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. 32 Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.”

We live in a very different age with the emergence of Social Media. We can say whatever we want at the push of a button and hundreds if not thousands of people see our comments. Criticism flows freely on the internet; after all, I'm entitled to expressing my opinion, right?!

It's easy to criticize something or someone when we sit behind our laptop in the privacy of our home; but it's a very different thing to say the same thing directly to the person if they were standing right in front of us face to face.

However, speaking criticism about someone whether they're in front of us or not, well, the bottom line for us who wear Jesus' Name...

“It's Wrong!”

I recently heard a pastor say that we have become people who are experts at making comments while losing the art of having a conversation. There's something powerful in that thought, and look at the

connection of it to this verse from Ephesians.

Paul exhorts the Christians at Ephesus to “let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment.” Going back to this pastor's idea of comment vs conversation; if we position ourselves to have an interactive conversation with someone, and we do it with the attitude of being kind and tender hearted to that person, it's highly unlikely an “Unwholesome Word” is going to come out of my mouth.

But, when I'm on the phone with a friend, or at my computer ready to “type away” and “share” something about another person...that's not a conversation I'm having, but instead, it's a comment that I'm making which is harmful. I need to own my critical comments, and stop making them.

So, if you're honest with yourself, how have you done in this area of having conversations, or making comments?

Do your words bring life, healing, and encouragement to the person you're speaking to or about; OR do your words bring criticism, division, and dissension to the Body?

With the expansion of Social Media, we need to recognize that our sinful nature is so vulnerable toward making comments, instead of having life-giving conversations that bring edification for the need of the moment.

Challenge yourself to really pay attention to the words you speak or write. Pray that God can begin a new habit of communication in and through you if that is needed. Or, if you've done well in this area, pray that God will open your eyes to see that person who is in need of an edifying word for their immediate need of the moment.

PRAYER:

Dear God,

Forgive me and the careless words that have come out of my mouth or fingertips. Help me to live out the counsel of Paul's words where I would seek out opportunities to say or write that which brings encouragement to someone.

Thank You for all the times You brought someone into my life and they spoke encouraging things to me. Help me to no longer be a part of satan's demolition crew with destructive words that come out of me. Instead, God help me be a part of Your construction crew where the words that come out of me bring life! Thank You for Your mercy, love, and forgiveness that You freely gave to me. Empower me to do the same with my brothers and sisters in Christ, as well as those who don't know You, so that in my actions...they might see You. I ask this in Your powerful Name Jesus,

AMEN!