

The Spiritual Discipline of Fellowship

Picture a fireplace in which a fire has been lit, but has died down to embers. Can you see that big lump of orange-hot coals, and piled together? It stays hot for a long time, doesn't it? Often, when you come back the next morning, those embers are still glowing. They keep each other warm. But you also may have experienced what it's like when one of those coals spontaneously pops out of the fireplace and lands on the hearth (or worse, your expensive family room carpet!). In just a few minutes, that coal, all by itself, will burn out and become completely cold.

The spiritual discipline of Christian fellowship is like that. Fellowship is a gift from God that reminds me of how much I depend on other Christians for meaningful spiritual growth. God has designed you and me to stick close to all the other burning embers to keep our spiritual fire going. If we do not involve ourselves in meaningful community, it's hard to keep burning hot for the Lord.

Dallas Willard says that in fellowship we engage in common activities of worship, study, prayer, celebration, and service *with other Christians*. All of us together contain more of God and experience his presence much better than we do as scattered individuals.

The Bible is loaded with emphasis on the importance of meaningful interaction with other followers of Christ. The phrase "one another" is used seventy-one times in the New Testament. Here are a few of the verses that emphasize community:

A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. (John 13:34)

So in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. (Romans 12:5)

There should be no division in the body, but ... its parts should have equal concern for each other. (I Cor 12:25)

Many Christians stop somewhere along the way in the level of depth of their relationship to Christ. Content to attend weekly worship and occasionally read the Bible or pray at home, they never experience the

rich depth of spiritual life that comes from knowing and being known by other Christians in a spiritual relationship.

At Crossroads, small groups are our way of living out this commitment to others in the Body of Christ. In our 2:42 groups, hundreds of new members and new Christians have gotten to know God better by getting to know their fellow-believers better. The small group setting is a sort of laboratory for helping each other experiment with improving our walk with God. It's also a place to experience the fulfillment of the promise of Jesus Himself:

Where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them. (Matthew 18:20)