

# THE POWER OF FELLOWSHIP

## Part 4 - Living On Purpose

1 PETER 3:8-12 (ESV)



Pastor Russ Ramsey  
February 14, 2010  
Oak Hills Presbyterian Church,  
Overland Park, Kansas

### INTENTION

As we continue in this short series on the power of fellowship, we turn our attention now to what many today refer to as “intentionality.” Marriage experts use this word a lot, saying a healthy marriage is one marked by intentionality. So what does this word mean? Is it the opposite of spontaneity? No. We

can certainly be intentionally spontaneous. Does intentionality undermine the presence of mystery in our relationships? No. We can be intentional about exploring and enjoying the mysteries of life together. Is intentionality some sort of “better way” than simply having fun? No. How we play, rest, celebrate and embrace the fullness of life should be *intentionally* fun.

Intentionality isn’t the opposite of these things we’ve named. By intentionality, I mean we approach every facet of our lives with purpose—as though they matter. Whether in our work, play, rest, worship, families, friendships or service to the world around us, the call on the Christian is to engage in everything we do as though it matters before God. The Apostle Paul said it this way: “Whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.” (1 Cor 10:31) But underneath this principle lies an even bigger one: it isn’t just that everything we do matters—**who we are matters.**

Today we focus on the call to be intentional about who we are and how we live in fellowship with one another so that we might better grasp the power fellowship is meant to have in our lives. To get at this, we turn to 1 Peter 3:8-12, which comes in the context of Peter describing the marks of the Christian life. Beyond what we’re to do, Peter lays out who we are to be.

### FELLOWSHIP AS ART

When you consider fellowship—that facet of your life given to being around and in ongoing relationships with other people—what do you see? Is fellowship primarily a way we use some of our time? Is it an expense of effort or an opportunity to unplug from the worries in your life? When you pull into someone else’s driveway, walk up to their door and step across their threshold, what are you doing? I recognize this can sound like a very dense, existential question. But the answer is important. Otherwise we might just see such visits as a form of killing time.

What if I were to tell you that when you step across the threshold of someone’s home for a community group meeting or a Bible Study or to console the hurting or help the confused or feed the hungry or visit the sick or imprisoned, you are engaging in something that is nothing short of a form of art?

Think about it. Art is the work of communication through creation. It is taking simple elements of tones or colors or words or flavors and applying them to a place or a person where they weren’t before. When a woman has a baby and you bring her some flowers, you’re using beauty, color and scent to express joy, affection and empathy. When you take a struggling family a meal, you’re taking common ingredients and delivering them in an assembled design so that the one you care for can not only enjoy the delicious food but also know you recognize their physical needs are related to their emotional and spiritual needs, and you want to do whatever you can to minister them.

When you step into someone else’s life as a friend, you’re standing on holy ground. All their hopes and fears and doubts and regrets find an audience with you and your hopes and fears and doubts and regrets. Sometimes we share those, other times not—but they are always still present, effecting how we relate to one another. The Bible tells us we can be of great help to one another if we’d practice fellowship. We have flavors to introduce, colors to add to the canvas, songs not yet heard. Only a small few of us probably go around thinking about the influence we exert in relationships in this way, but I contend this really is the way it is and it is a Biblical way to think—a point we see illustrated in our text even today. Let’s look at it.

### WHO WE ARE BEFORE GOD

Taking our text in context, Peter is focused in on a particular aspect of the Christian life—how we conduct ourselves. So he is not saying if we have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love and the like, we’ll be saved. Peter is addressing believers living in community together His point is since we have already been set apart by Christ, this is how we are to live in response to Him.

We need to say a quick word about the promise of blessing we find in this text. (v. 9) As you see, Peter is talking here about how we conduct our lives, and he is linking it to the blessing of a life we’ll love filled with good days. (v. 10) Many voices in American evangelicalism have perverted what Peter is talking about here by suggesting our good behavior is like coins in the celestial vending machine of blessing. Look at verse 9. We could take it out of context to imply that if we don’t repay evil for evil, we’ll receive a special blessing in return, which is then given some sort of monetary or social value—“Give to ministry X and God will return your generosity 10 times over.”

### 1 PETER 3:8-12

<sup>8</sup>Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind. <sup>9</sup>Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing. <sup>10</sup>For

“Whoever desires to love life and see good days,  
let him keep his tongue from evil  
and his lips from speaking deceit;

<sup>11</sup>let him turn away from evil and do good;  
let him seek peace and pursue it.

<sup>12</sup>For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous,  
and his ears are open to their prayer.

But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.”

This view of God is offensive because it treats His blessings as payments for exemplary behavior with the focus being on what we do, not on who we are as people. This text isn't saying God is like a magic genie granting wishes to the obedient. Peter is teaching that the enjoyment of life is found in cooperating with God's design for how we're meant to live. In other words, there is a way we are meant to live—close to the heart of God, obedient to His precepts—and when this is the life we live, we should expect it to be blessed, and likewise, when we live a life rejecting the ways of God, we should expect that life to be riddled with frustration—and even more, as verse 12 says, we should expect God to oppose our rebellion against him.

Does this mean if we're obedient we'll never suffer? No, not so long as we live in this broken world. But as Peter puts it in earlier verses, we are to regard ourselves as sojourners and exiles in a far country, living as obedient citizens of the Kingdom to which we belong—God's Kingdom. <sup>(1Pet 2:11-12)</sup> What does the life of a citizen of the Kingdom of God look like? We return blessing for cursing, kindness for unkindness, mercy for cruelty. And why? Because this is what our King has done for us.

As citizens of God's Kingdom, we have more than a list of rules to follow. We have an **identity**. Peter's audience knew great persecution and suffering. Some were beginning to lose heart. So what does Peter tell them to do? Burrow deeper into the mercy and provision of Christ **and into the fellowship of the believers He has given us**. There is power there for the weak. Our text deals with this community. Peter tells us to have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart and a humble mind. What do these have in common? They all take seriously the brokenness of the world in which we live and they all believe we can have a redemptive impact. These are community oriented ways to live, not simply things to do. But the only way to live by these precepts is to embrace the art of fellowship.

## THE WORK OF ART

Relationships are a form of art and whether you know it, or even like it or not. You are a contributing artist to other people's stories. You have influence. We know this—both by the positives and negatives, right? We know that when we get a card in the mail from a friend just telling us they love us, it boosts our spirits. We know that when we are hurting and someone close to us doesn't respond in the way we hoped they would, it affects the way we see the world—sometimes even to the point that we hold and nurse a wound they have no idea they are associated with—sometimes for years after the fact.

Can we agree that we know we influence one another's lives by how we relate to one another? Even those who work really hard at keeping a certain distance and maintaining impenetrable personal privacy—surely even you can see that what you bring to the relationships around you is this message that people can only come so far with you and no further. Does that not influence the way people regard you and you them?

We can't avoid adding to the big picture of one another's lives. We add by how we engage *and* by how we avoid. We add through our kindness *and* our cruelty, our generosity *and* our greed, our courage *and* our fear, our compassion *and* our indifference, our humility *and* our arrogance. Like a painter with his paints, a musician with her instrument or a writer with his pen, we add to the composition of one another's lives. Sometimes what we add is beautiful, other times it is horrifying. But let's at least admit it—we influence each other. Our text presumes it, and more, says this can be a powerfully good thing.

So the question then becomes: If fellowship is a form of art and we can't help but be contributing artists, how can we become intentionally good artists? The answer is, by God's gracious design, pretty simple. But I must warn you, it will also be dissatisfying to many. I want to illustrate the answer with a familiar instrument—the violin—and a familiar song—John Newton's most famous hymn, Amazing Grace. If I, a man who has never played the violin, play the same melody as a trained violinist, what will be the reason for the difference you hear?

How do we prepare ourselves to come alongside the friend who's just discovered she has cancer, or the man who's just lost his job, or the teenager who has made a life changing mistake? How do we become equipped to sit in silence when silence is what's called for, or to speak when words are few? Where do we find the footing to confront or correct, or the traction to walk long, hard roads toward healing when we know there are no short, easy ones? Borrowing from the title of this series, how do we engage in powerful fellowship in those moments when much is needed? We **practice**. We do the **work** of art. We practice the art of fellowship every day.

## LIVING ON PURPOSE

How do we practice the art of fellowship? We put ourselves in each other's paths both when there is an urgent need for help and when there is not. Taking the analogy of music and the musician further, no good musician only picks up her instrument when it is time to go on stage and perform. In fact, the vast majority of the time she spends with her violin is in practice—no pressure to perform, no spotlights, no critics; just the routine rehearsal of scales to the ticking of the metronome.

So it is with relationships. The vast majority of the time we invest in relationships is spent doing the practice that equips us to walk through hard times together. We get to know each other. We laugh, compare life stories, become acquainted with one another's passions and pet peeves. We discover the nuances of one another's families, upbringings and approaches toward the future. When does all this discovery and groundwork take place? Let's name a few common to Oak Hills.

- **COMMUNITY GROUPS:** A ministry we are going to be giving significant attention to developing further this year.
- **SUNDAY SCHOOL CLASSES:** Unity and humility of mind are developed through learning and processing together.
- **CHURCH PARTIES AND PICNICS:** Deliberate unhurried time for the entire church. Friendship foundations are laid here.
- **THE COFFEE AND DONUT TABLE:** A potpourri of faces and stories. It is an important thing to "check in" with people.
- **BABY AND BRIDAL SHOWERS:** Meet extended family, hear stories from way back, see people in the context of family.
- **MEN'S AND WOMEN'S BIBLE STUDIES:** Focused opportunities for going deeper with others who share a similar road.

All these sorts of events have value. If you would come to such events, or others like them, with open eyes, looking for ways you might come to know one another better, this is what you'll see. You will be better equipped to be the blessing Peter calls you to be in our text today. Do the work of artful relationships. Log the hours of the practice of fellowship. You don't have to come to everything. That's not the point. But engage with something in an intentional way. It will not be a waste of your time. The fellowship of the saints is part of what makes life lovely, part of what makes the days good. We were meant to live with unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly affection, tender hearts and unity of mind. May this be our purposeful practice.