

Every year, the Oxford Dictionary selects a Word of the Year.

- They select this Word of the Year based on its frequency of usage AND how it represents the *mindset* of that particular year.
- I think the Word of the Year they chose in 2013 is quite telling and represents our current climate very well.
- Let's see if you can figure out the word by its definition:
 - Definition: "A picture that you take of yourself by using the camera on your smartphone and is posted on social media."
 - Answer: "SELFIE"

It's no surprise because this is the most photographed generation of all time.

But a "selfie" carries with it the idea of self-centeredness & being self-absorbed.

The selfie-mindset shouts, "Hey, let's all take a moment and LOOK AT ME! CHECK ME OUT! THINK ABOUT ME. CONSIDER ME."

This type of mindset leads to isolation (we're busy thinking about ourselves!)

BUT throughout the pages of God's Word, we find a BETTER mindset...

...a richer, more powerful, more meaningful endeavor than "selfies".

It is the concept of *FELLOWSHIP*

We're invited, not into isolation, but into community...into a partnership with one another... a common sharing of lives.

The selfie-mindset says, "Consider *me*", fellowship says "Consider *one another*"

...that we might ALL grow together in the Grace of God.

Today we continue in our IGNITE series with: IGNITE YOUR FELLOWSHIP!

Please open your Bibles and join me in Hebrews 10:24-25.

A little context to the book of Hebrews:

- We don't know who wrote the book of Hebrews (unknown author).
- The letter was most likely written to Jewish-Christians who were facing persecution.
- The main point of Hebrews is to proclaim Jesus as Superior...greater than the angels, Abraham, and Moses.
- And the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross was superior and better than all the sacrifices performed by the priests year after year.

I'm going to direct our attention to verses 24 & 25 because it speaks specifically to the importance of fellowship.

But here's what leads up to these verses:

- The author states that Jesus has provided us ACCESS to God through His blood shed on the cross.
- Because of Jesus' work, we can boldly enter God's presence.
 - Not because of our good works or anything on our part
 - All because Jesus has paved the way for us.

Since Jesus has provided access to God, the author gives three encouragements to those who are IN Christ:

Verse 22: *Let us draw near to God*, because we have been washed clean! God has invited us into fellowship with Him through Jesus... so don't keep your distance!

- Meet with God in prayer & the Scriptures every day

Verse 23: *Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering*, for God is faithful.

- Don't waver back and forth in faith, but cling to God.

We hold on to God, but at the end of the day, we are secure because of GOD'S GRIP ON US, not our grip on Him!

And now in this 3rd encouragement, the author shifts the focus from individual responses to our mutual responsibility toward one another:

Hebrews 10:24-25: And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.

Let us *consider one another*...

- "consider" means to *notice...pay attention to... look closely at*
- (Hey, I'm not alone! There's other people here!)
- Did you know the population of Shasta County, with one minor exception, consists of other people?

The relationship that Jesus has brought us into with the Father is to overflow into our relationships with one another.

IGNITING our Fellowship begins by considering one another.

It calls for serious thinking about other Christians with a purpose to “*stir up...to provoke...to stimulate toward love and good works.*”

Paul said in Ephesians 2:10 (after declaring that we are SAVED by Grace through Faith and NOT by works)

For we are His workmanship, [poiema: His product; His work of art;] created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them. ...we walk in good works BECAUSE we have been saved...

The author of Hebrews tells us that we NEED each other.

We need each other to stir us up to walk in love and the good works God has prepared for us each day.

Verse 25 tells us HOW to consider one another: By NOT forsaking the assembling of ourselves together.(Translation: we meet together.) ...in whatever way, shape, or form...Christians meet together.

Call me old school, but I prefer the method of being in the same physical area and looking at one another and listening to one another.

I understand that some of us have to get creative in how we meet together due to geographical hindrances, health issues, transportation challenges, and scheduling difficulties.

But those who DO NOT meet together (in whatever way, shape or form)

are not able to *consider one* another and therefore do nothing to increase love and good works in the life of another Christian. Encouragement cannot take place in isolation!

But, according to Hebrews 10:25, some were “forsaking” the assembly; they had given up meeting together.

We don’t know why. The passage does not indicate the reason.

- Maybe it was because of the persecution they were facing...?
- Maybe they were discouraged because Christ had not returned yet...?
- Maybe it was apathy or laziness...?
- Or maybe it was that people thought they did not need anyone else’s help or encouragement...?

Today, many Christians have given up meeting together with other Christians...

But the point of this passage is clear: do not forsake each other, but exhort one another, so much the more as you see the Day approaching.

- The “Day” most likely refers to the second coming of Jesus.
- We are still awaiting Jesus’ return...and every day brings us nearer to the coming of our Lord Jesus, Amen?

Exhort: to urge someone to do something

- What is the “something” we are to urge one another to do?
 1. To Draw Near to God
 2. To Hold Fast our confession of faith
 3. To Consider One Another to stir up love and good works.

The Early Church was committed to meeting together:

Acts 2:42-47 (NKJV): And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.

Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need. So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.

They continued in “fellowship” (*Koinonia*: sharing in common; a participation)

- They ate together. They shared their things with one another.
- They LINKED ARMS. Their lives were INTERMINGLED...they were DEVOTED to EACH OTHER.
- Their eyes were NOT on themselves, but they saw the other believers, they considered them, they served each other.

The church was committed to TEMPLE Fellowship & TABLE Fellowship. (v. 46) They met together in the Temple. A large meeting place where they took part in the daily worship activities led by the priests (prayers, the daily sacrifice, receiving a blessing from the priests). They met in HOUSE to HOUSE...on their own...around a table where they ate together and praised God together (*Table Fellowship*). You are here today for the large church service...that is good!

Are you also a part of a TABLE-LIKE FELLOWSHIP with a smaller group of Christians for encouragement?

- where you are known by others as you know them on a deeper level...?
- where you care for one another because you are aware of each other's needs...?
- where you give and receive prayer, counsel, and encouragement as you seek to walk in the good works the Lord has prepared for you?

How does this passage in Luke conclude?

Luke 2:47 "And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved."

As Christians were committed to FELLOWSHIP, people were being saved! Christian Fellowship provided an opportunity for witness to those outside of the church!

- They did not become a Christian huddle, but rather they left the door open for others to participate.
- They "opened their circle"
- What better way to demonstrate the love of Jesus Christ than to invite others to participate with us?
- It can be as simple as inviting a friend to "Come and See"

Christians: we need each other. We are wired for relationship.

- Do you have a belly button?
- An unmistakable sign that we were all once connected to our mothers.
- Life began in utter dependence upon another.
- But as we grow, we buy into the lie that says we don't need anyone else.

Fellowship among Christians is a GOOD GIFT from God to His people. Unfortunately, many people find themselves cut-off from the church and the healing, protective, and encouraging functions it provides.

In their isolation, they are easy prey for our enemy. Wolves do not attack an entire herd...they attack the lamb that is separated from the flock. As one author said, "Isolation is the garden of the devil."

The Giant Redwood Trees we see in California are the tallest trees on earth. Growing as tall as 350 feet...even though they have a quite shallow root system! And the reason these trees are able to remain upright is by growing close together with other redwood trees so their roots can be intermingled with others. As Christians, we need "interlocking roots" with other believers to withstand the enormous weight and challenges in life. Neighborhood Church: Let us Ignite Our Fellowship! Why? Because...

- God works THROUGH YOU to encourage *others* to grow in grace.
- God works THROUGH OTHERS to encourage *you* to grow in grace.

Here's how to Ignite Your Fellowship:

1. Commit to Regular Participation in a Weekend Worship Service
 - Remember, the early church gathered for "Temple Fellowship"
 - Congratulations, you're here!
 - It is important to gather with the larger community for
 - common teaching
 - praising God with one voice by singing the same song together
 - for remembering Christ together through communion,
 - to celebrate baptisms together (next week)
 - the worshipful giving of tithes and offerings to the God's work.
 - Good things happen when we show up to worship together.
 - Do we have to go to church on the weekend? No...We GET to!
2. Seek Out some form of Small Group Fellowship
 - The early church also gathered in homes for "Table Fellowship." Where you face each other. Groups of 3, 8, 15, 25
 - In these smaller settings, we can better experience:
 - Encouragement: having others speak into our priorities & relationships.
 - Belonging: being known, connected with a group of people
 - Care: looking after the needs of one another.
 - Growth: studying God's Word together (ask questions; share insight)

What do we offer at Neighborhood to Facilitate Small Group Fellowship?

1. Join our 3-Week Knowing God class starting next Sunday at 11:15am in Care Center #162
 - o I'll be teaching this class as we ask the question, "What is God like?"
 - o Our goal is to think rightly about God

- o We'll look at some attributes of God: aspects that God has declared to be true about Himself.
- o Visit the Life Group table in the lobby to sign up...or fill out the "Get Connected Card" in the seatback and write "Knowing God class" and place it in the offering basket.
- 2. Join a Life Group
 - o A Life Group is a small group of people who connect to study God's Word and encourage one another spiritually.
 - o Pick up a Groups Brochure at the table in the lobby to find out about the many groups you can join.
 - o Or write "Life Group" on your Get Connected card and place it in the offering basket.
- 3. Help LEAD a Life Group!
 - o We are always launching new Life Groups...which takes new Life Group leaders!
 - o We will train, equip, and support you in leading a Life Group.
 - o Life Group Leader Lab: at the Osborne's for 3 weeks in November.
 - Interested, sign up at the table to learn more. Write "Life Group Leader" on your Get Connected card.
- 4. Running Partners
 - o Running Partners consist of 3 people who meet together for a set amount of time (3-6 months) to encourage each other as we grow in grace. I met a man this past week who has been meeting with his Running Partners for the past 2 years as they encourage each other in Christ. Pick up a brochure at the Life Groups table in the lobby

If you are fortunate to currently have fellowship like this in your life:

- Praise God for those people He has placed in your life
- Re-Ignite your commitment to stir each other up toward love & good works
- Ask: Who can we invite to join our fellowship? (Open the Circle!)

A Few Thoughts Final Word about Fellowship:

1. We're encouraging consistent involvement, NOT frenetic activity in all programs the church offers!
2. Christian Fellowship does NOT mean giving control of your life over to other people!
3. Christian Fellowship is often messy and can be challenging.
 - That's because it consists of people like YOU & ME.
 - Some have a pipe dream of what a Life Group is supposed to be.
 - We're all best friends, we always get along...no conflict!
 - When things go sour, we give up on fellowship.
 - Release that pipe dream...that "wish dream"...and embrace the reality of those God places around you.
 - Fellowship is not an ideal to realize, but a reality created by God that we get to participate in.

Lastly, let me caution us about "Selfie-Fellowship"

- We approach Fellowship for the sole purpose of getting our needs met.
- "What do I GET out of this? I need encouragement..."
- But as we look at the teaching in Hebrews 10:24, we learn that the primary focus is to CONSIDER others (not to be considered) and to STIR OTHERS (not to be stirred up).

But I believe that when we approach fellowship for what we have to GIVE...we end up receiving the encouragement that WE so desperately need.

Sadhu Sundhar Sing and a companion were traveling through a pass high in the Himalayan Mountains when they came across a body lying in the snow. They checked for vital signs and discovered the man still alive, though barely so. Sundar Sing prepared to stop and help this unfortunate traveler but his companion objected, saying, "We shall lose our lives if we burden ourselves with him." Sundar Singh, however, could not think of leaving the man to die in the snow without an attempted rescue on his part. His companion quickly said farewell and walked on. Sundar Singh lifted the poor traveler onto his back. With great exertion on his part—made even greater by the high altitude and snowy conditions—he carried the man onward. As he walked, the heat cast off by his body began to warm the frozen man. The man revived and soon, both were walking together side by side, each holding the other up—and, in turn, each giving body heat to the other. Before long, they came upon yet another traveler's body lying in the snow. Upon closer inspection, they discovered him to be dead, frozen by the cold. It was Sundar Singh's original traveling companion.

...Often, in the process of reaching out to carry the burdens of OTHERS, we end up receiving the help WE so desperately need.