

# **Fellowship with God** by Marshall Billingslea

**“Fellowship”** is defined as— the condition of a friendly relationship between 2 people. It is a camaraderie, or the state of being in harmony.

Every person ever born has the need for a healthy, friendly, fulfilling relationship with God, although some find it, many do not. Our relationships with people often mirror, imitate, or mask that need.

I can remember a time in my life when I did not know if God existed, or if He knew that I existed. I never went to church as a kid and I didn't know enough about God to have faith. When I was about 9 years old, I got mad at my Mom and my older brother while my step-dad was gone away on business. I ran away from home, but stayed close enough to see the house. I was gone for a total of about an hour, and I don't know if anyone even noticed. We lived away from town so there was nowhere to go. I sat down near a bush and prayed in the only way I knew how. This is what I said, “If there is really a God, how come my life is not happy”. I got no answer, I felt abandoned and depressed. There was no lightning, or voice from heaven, so I went home. Sad to say, this is the extent of most peoples' cry for spiritual help.

I still don't hear audible voices, or see into the heavens, but over time, I have come to know God by knowing His people and reading His word. He walks with me every day and He is my closest friend. My prayer is that this study guide will help you know Him in the same way.

In Jeremiah ch. 1, God says, “*Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you...do not be afraid, for I am with you*”.

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## **Broken fellowship**

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God created heavens and earth, with all the provisions necessary for a relationship with man. If all the security of a paradise in the garden, perfect weather, and perfect harmony of all living things were enough, man would never have fallen from grace. These outward things were not the basis of fellowship. Only inward qualities can produce real fellowship. Adam and Eve violated the boundaries set by God. Man had broken the trust of this relationship by choosing to feed a temporary, selfish desire. That's the way all fellowship is broken. We choose selfish ambition over mutual edification.

One of the saddest verses in the Bible tells us of when man turned away from his relationship with God. It must have crushed Gods heart, just like any relationship when trust is broken. (Gen. 3:8) And they heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God amongst the trees of the garden.

Living with shame and guilt causes us to withdraw and we try to cover our inadequacy with good works. There is never enough. We can not earn or buy redemption, but Gods plan is adequate and simple. The Bible says to (A) admit our guilt / Rom. 3:23

(B) believe on Jesus / John 1:12

(C) confess our sins / Rom. 10:9

1. How do we confuse the outward and inward qualities of fellowship?
2. Why do we often choose selfishly?
3. Why don't we admit our failure?
4. How do we camouflage true fellowship?
5. Why do we have a hard time with repentance? Is repentance a one time event?
6. Why do we often embrace shame and guilt?
7. Can a person be a church member or even a religious leader and still not know God?
8. Can our fellowship with God be broken once we've had a genuine experience?
9. If God seems distant or unjust, is it normal to question Him?
10. At the tower of Babel (Genesis chapter 11), was man trying to connect with God?

Why was it unsuccessful?

## **Restored relationship**

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We must be able to admit that something is broke in order to fix it. How many of us are holding on to that antique piece of furniture or that 30 year old hot

rod in the garage? Of course our spouse says to get rid of that junk, but we know it has real value. God is like the master craftsman who takes an object back to its original creation. He strips off the finish, replaces broken pieces and makes it like new. Of course, He's in the people business.

2 Cor 5:17—Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!

Job 22:23—If you return to the Almighty, you will be restored.

When someone crosses a moral boundary, it violates or separates the relationship. Sin causes the violation, and restoration requires help. Jesus came to restore our fellowship, which came by way of his sacrifice. Only this keeps us from hiding like Adam and Eve did in the garden. This is an instantaneous experience, but also an ongoing process. Salvation comes immediately, but spiritual maturity is a lifelong journey. God wants things back the way He originally intended, without excess baggage. He wants to free us from any burden of guilt or shame. Psalm 103:12—as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us. 2 Cor. 5:18—All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ.

To reconcile is to resolve differences, and to restore harmony, this is exactly what God does with us.

1. When God restores us to Himself, do we still have the desire to sin?
2. What makes it hard to be reconciled?
3. How has God restored other relationships?
4. What is a dysfunctional relationship?
5. How is relationship different from religion?
6. What is a covenant? How does it apply?
7. How is God's relationship with us paralleled with our human relationships? (family, friends, etc)
8. Are there relationships with people that can cause us problems with our relationship to God?
9. How should we handle problem relationships?
10. How does God handle problem relationships?

## **Friendship**

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Its confusing to think about all the contemporary perceptions of God. Everything from “The man upstairs”, to the effeminate, passive, and weak philosopher. Do we see him as a Judge ready to wheel his power of damnation, or

as a preoccupied CEO sitting in the ivory tower? Religious people like the Pharisees, often misrepresent God's character.

Jesus, however, lived among the people, connected to their way of life, and enabled people to access God for themselves. Jesus in the flesh is God's access to humanity. We now live with an open channel to be friends with God. John 15:15 - I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends.

Observe Jesus' interaction with His friends—

John 21:4 Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus. He called out to them, "Friends, haven't you any fish?" "No," they answered. He said, "Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some." When they did, they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish.

Jesus went to them, because He cared about what they did and helped them succeed. He supported their work without recognition. They in turn, supported His work. They were true friends. Proverbs 18:24—A man of many companions may come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.

1. Who is our closest friends?
2. How do we treat them?
3. Do we spend as much time with God as we do other friends?
4. What is it that our friends don't know about us, or we feel that we can't share with them? Why?
5. Do we tell God private things because we know we can trust Him, but neglect the common things, because He's too busy?
6. Does God care about our daily routine?
7. " " lifelong dreams / goals?
8. " " problems / frustrations?
9. How do we communicate our trust for God?
10. How much can He trust us / and with what?

**Define these valued traits of friendship:**

1. Trust
2. Forgiveness
3. Acceptance
4. Open communication
5. Commitment

## **Mutual desire**

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Have you ever been in a one-sided friendship? Not very fun! Of course we know that the Bible teaches us to pursue God, to hunger and thirst for righteousness, to seek, ask, and knock. Only then will we connect with Him. But

have we thought about how much He has done to pursue us? Jesus used examples of the lost coin, lost sheep, prodigal son and so on, to illustrate something. I always thought it was about our need to find God. But He's not lost, we are! He is diligently searching for us. Remember Adam and Eve, they hid from God, not the other way around.

2 Chron. 16:9—For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him.

Another biblical understanding comes from the gospel of John. He refers to himself as the disciple *“whom Jesus loved”*. I always thought, how self centered of John, didn't Jesus love them all? Most of us talk about our love for God, and our commitment to Him, but John knew that what really mattered was that Jesus loved him and that changed his life. Many frustrated preachers try to get people to love God, to commit, to serve, or to give, but people really respond when they learn that God has already loved, committed, served and given.

1 John 4:19—We love him, because he first loved us.

1. What is our greatest desire?
2. What do other people think is our greatest desire?
3. How has God shown his desire for us personally?
4. How has he intervened in our life?
5. What do we spend our money on?
6. “ “ time?
7. What does God spend His time doing?
8. What did Jesus spend His time on earth doing?
9. What eventually happens in a one sided friendship?
10. What does God require of us?

## Communion

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Most Christian churches have some traditions regarding the ritual of partaking bread and wine. This term goes much deeper than a doctrinal debate for protestants and catholics. It's not about what we believe. It's about how our belief becomes part of us. Either we consume the life of God, or we are consumed by our own way of life.

John 6:48 I am the bread of life. 49Your forefathers ate the manna in the

desert, yet they died. 50But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which a man may eat and not die. 51I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world."... 53Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. 54Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life... 66From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him.

The definition of “commune” is– the act of sharing, or having in common. Some people actually live in a “commune” because of their commitment to one another, but Gods intent is for us to have a communion with Him far greater than our bond with people. 1 John 1:3—We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.

1. What can be misleading about the ritual of communion in church?
2. What are some ways we can experience communion with God?
3. How has God provided for us to have spiritual communion with Him?
4. How can our daily attitude or disposition effect our communion with God?
5. When / How have we turned away or hindered the communion God desires with us?
6. Has there ever been a time when the cost seemed to high to follow Christ?
7. Is it possible to be more connected to the church than we are to God?
8. Do the elements or traditions of communion matter?  
(“*sacrament*” / “*ordinance*”)
9. Is it possible for those who face the greatest trials in life to have the deepest communion with God? Why?
10. Is the ritual of communion in any way connected to Jewish Passover?

## **Intimacy**

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The state of being very personal, sharing private things, or familiar with things no one else knows. This is how we understand intimacy. We share our private and personal feelings, we cry, we dream, and we joke around, or do we? How many of us are comfortable with this kind of behavior? Many people are taught to be guarded, stoic, or “proper”. Society has given us a cold or crude interpretation of intimacy.

Because of unhealthy expressions of intimacy, people are often closed off to it. We don’t take the time to learn healthy expressions, therefore, we always seem to be limited in our relationships. Spouses and children can suffer from a lack of

intimacy, and often search it out in inappropriate ways. If we do not express our most personal thoughts and ways to God, how can we climb higher, go deeper, or experience Him as He desires. Many people are afraid of emotional worship, this is one basic example. People feel safe in a church where everything is predictable.

In the Bible we find very unpredictable acts of worship such as King David dancing before the ark of the covenant and loosing his clothes. His wife was embarrassed and critical, but he responded by saying—(2 Samuel 6:22)I will become even more undignified than this, and I will be humiliated in my own eyes. Mary wept at the feet of Jesus and washed his feet with her tears, this was highly unconventional. Even though this made others uncomfortable, her focus was intimate worship, not the approval of men.

1. How have we been guarded with our intimacy towards God?
2. “ “ toward others?
3. What are some ways we can express our love for God intimately?
4. How did Jesus define public acts of worship done for recognition?
5. Discuss the following stories of how Jesus connected with people in a private setting:
  - a. The widows mite Mark 12:43
  - b. Woman at the well John 4:9
  - c. Nicodemus John 3:2
6. What about an intimate connection in a public setting?
  - a. Zacchaeus Luke 19:2
  - b. Woman with the issue of blood Luke 8:43
  - c. Healing the soldiers ear (Malchus) Luke 22:50

## **Companionship**

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To be closely connected, to keep company with, to walk side by side, this is a companion. Jesus was criticized for “*keeping company with*” sinners. Sinners like me and you. His companions were simple blue collar workers, or they were often white collar workers with questionable career fields. Whatever the case, Jesus was always loyal to his companions.

Often times we can’t find loyalty in earthly companions, so we settle for a dog...man’s best friend! We might even walk side by side or stay closely connected to our job. That’s what seems the most fulfilling or rewarding. If you’ve lived through a broken marriage, been abandoned by parents, or a child who hasn’t called for years, you know what it’s like to grieve and long for companionship. The apostle Paul lost a dear friend in 2 Tim. 4:10—for Demas, because he loved this

world, has deserted me and has gone.

When you feel alone, remember Jesus is waiting. He was rejected and despised, he was forsaken and abandoned. He did it to make a way to be your companion for life. When you see an elderly couple holding hands in the mall, enjoying the fruit of long term companionship, you see a mirror of Gods heart for His relationship with us.

Heb. 13:5— and be content with what you have, because God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you."

1. Do people with unhealthy earthly companionships, often struggle with their relationship with God?
  2. Have we treated God like an associate or like a lifelong companion?
  3. Have you ever experienced the loss of a companion?
  4. How did that affect your faith?
  5. Can we actually draw closer to God as a result?
  6. How can we be a companion to Jesus?
  7. How can we grow more committed?
  8. Can He count on us to be faithful?
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### **Mature Relationship**

Several years ago, I led a friend of mine to the Lord. He and his family received Christ and attended church faithfully. Unfortunately his relationship with God was a shallow one, and because of his spiritual immaturity, he did not get rooted in faith properly. He soon questioned God, Christ, the Bible, and the church because of what he saw on the discovery channel! This is all too common, and if people are left to themselves to develop randomly, the world will rob us of that precious seed of faith. Mark 4:16 *Others... hear the word and at once receive it with joy. But since they have no root, they last only a short time.*

There are 3 essential elements to getting “rooted” in Christ. Knowing the Bible, having a personal prayer life, and attending church. Consider these verses:



1. Acts 17:11—Now the Bereans were of more noble character ... they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.
2. Matt. 6:6—But **when you pray**, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen.
3. Heb. 10:25—Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another. *These 3 elements are not optional to spiritual maturity, they are the foundation of having real fellowship with God.*

1. What do you like about church fellowship?
2. What do you dislike about church fellowship?
3. Why do we need church fellowship?
4. What is the difference with Christian friends and worldly friends?
5. Why do people go to clubs, bars, etc.
6. Why do people join clubs, organizations, etc.
7. Why don't some people ever go to church?
8. Why don't most Christians pray, study the Bible, or serve in ministry?
9. Are other books just as important as the Bible?
10. What keeps us from praying?
11. Are we responsible for our own spiritual maturity?
12. How would a baby grow if it were left to itself?
13. Why are some Christians spiritually immature after 20 years of walking with God?