

# GOD'S CALL

## Major themes in the Scriptures

### The Holy Spirit (12)

#### Fellowship in the Spirit: basic level

**Reference: GDC-S18-012-Mw-R00-P2**

(Originally spoken on 12 January 2014, edited on 14 January 2014)

Web site: <http://www.ajourneyinlife.org> and <http://www.ajourneyinlife.com>

This message is protected by copyright © 2014 Lim Liong. Permission is given to reproduce part (where the meaning is retained and the part is not quoted out of context) or all, of it, for personal use or for distribution, on condition that **no changes are made** and the message is **distributed free** of charge. Please do so prayerfully and discreetly.

Unless otherwise stated, Scripture quotations are taken from the NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE®, Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.

The paragraphs above as well as this paragraph must be included when the message is reproduced so that others who reproduce it will be conscious of the conditions stated above.

The Lord willing, today we will consider the subject, “The Holy Spirit”, the twelfth message, in seeking to appreciate major themes in the Scriptures.

A short summary of today's message:

One major objective in God's creation of man is the quality of fellowship that can be nurtured among all who truly love Him and love one another. This can be developed only when we learn to nurture fellowship in the Spirit that arises from walking by the Spirit.

We will seek the Lord to appreciate more of what this means.

We have seen that walking by the Spirit is central and primary in God's purpose for our lives and arising from that, all the meaningful aspects of life can flow forth. Without walking by the Spirit, we will be living self-centred lives without proper goals and it will lead to nowhere: nothing of true meaning and value.

Fellowship in the Spirit is one of the very precious aspects that arise from walking by the Spirit, and it is primary and central in God's intention in His creation of mankind.

In the context of what we can see in the Scriptures of the meaning of fellowship, we see that the word translated as "fellowship" basically means "commonness". So, commonness by itself does not necessarily have to be spiritual; it does not necessarily have to be good. But in the context of the Scriptures, it refers to something very good and meaningful.

In the context of the world, there are also many people who do have commonness in many areas of life. Birds of a feather flock together; thieves come together to plan how to steal. People who want to have their own objectives fulfilled, they may have various things in common and they work together. But that kind of commonness is not what the Scriptures refer to.

In the Scriptures, the reference to commonness or fellowship has to do with areas of the utmost importance: What is truly valuable, meaningful, important in life: our commonness in that area and arising from that, how we live our lives together in that direction.

So I see that there are three major areas that we can consider that are very important in our understanding of fellowship.

Fellowship involves worship. That is one aspect. Fellowship involves prayer. That is another aspect. And fellowship involves living.

We will look at these three areas in our daily lives.

Fellowship in worship: Worship is of great and primary and supreme importance in our lives. True worship refers to our preparedness to give our lives to God to be totally submitted to Him, committed to do His will whatever it may cost us.

True worship is so central in our lives that it should direct all the things that we do, the way we live our lives each day.

So if we are to develop meaningful fellowship, it must first and foremost be in the area of worship. What do we truly value? Do we worship something that is not good or we worship that which is perfectly good?

In the Scriptural context, we see there are two directions in worship: one that is perfectly good and the other that is definitely and seriously evil.

Worshiping God, the true and living God, is that which is perfectly good. But Satan also wants to be worshipped and if people worship him, it will lead in the direction of evil.

So we need to be very careful in this area. Whom do we worship?

**Matthew 4: 8-10**

- 8 Again, the devil \*took Him to a very high mountain and \*showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory;
- 9 and he said to Him, "All these things I will give You, if You fall down and worship me."
- 10 Then Jesus \*said to him, "Go, Satan! For it is written, 'YOU SHALL WORSHIP THE LORD YOUR GOD, AND SERVE HIM ONLY.'"

The Lord Jesus as the perfect Man was tempted by the evil one and Satan offered Him the kingdoms of this world and their glory – this was on condition that the Lord Jesus would fall down and worship him.

Satan wants to be worshipped. This is an area that is very, very serious but many of us may not realize that we are moving in that direction when we do not properly worship God. When our hearts are not in the direction of a true worship of God, we become very vulnerable to what the evil one can offer us in this world.

There are many things that are very attractive. We find pleasure in these things; we feel happy. They can be very powerful in drawing us in that direction. Satan does not always come to us directly and say, "I am Satan, I am offering you all this." He works in ways that are deceptive, that may appear to be good but underlying it, he has the intention of drawing us in the direction of worshipping him, following him. When we do that, we move away from a true worship of God.

Seeking the things of this world does not always mean something obviously evil. There are many people who want to develop their talents – what they think they are naturally very good at – so that they do not waste their talent. And in many of such situations, in so doing, they become preoccupied with the things of this world, their heart is not centred on the eternal and on what is truly of value, and they therefore do not truly follow God.

The Lord Jesus answered Satan and said, "Go, Satan! For it is written, 'YOU SHALL WORSHIP THE LORD YOUR GOD, AND SERVE HIM ONLY.'"

We are to worship only the true, the almighty, the living, the perfect God who is the Creator of all things, who is perfectly wise and perfectly good. And it is in the context of worshipping God that we are to serve.

Many people may want to serve because they think that they can contribute something, they can achieve something and they may do many things to serve. But service that does not arise from the right motive and direction does not have value: we are to worship God and serve Him only.

Our service must arise from a true worship of God: because we love Him, we appreciate Him, we recognize His objectives, His goals, we want to fulfil His will. It is in that context that we serve and therefore, we will serve in accordance with His instructions, in accordance with His ways, in accordance with His enabling.

So fellowship in the Spirit must centre on one God and one goal. If our hearts are centred on God and we truly seek to live for Him, we will have true fellowship.

We do not need to declare fellowship; the fellowship is there. When our hearts move in that direction, we are not self-centred, we seek what is truly good in the eyes of God, there will be fellowship: It arises from that worship.

We need also to recognize that there are different degrees and depths of fellowship. The depth of our love for God and our commitment to Him, the degree to which we are prepared to work in accordance with His will, will determine the quality of fellowship in the Spirit.

There are many things that we do which may not be in accordance with the will of God and in such a context, as Paul says, there are many things that we do that will one day be burnt up: wood, hay and straw. They will be burnt up and in such a life, we will not have deep fellowship.

However, there is a basic level of fellowship in the Spirit that all of us can have if we are Christians and there will be a basic level of fellowship for all believers.

But we must not be satisfied with just the basic level of fellowship. There are higher and higher levels of fellowship that we should learn to develop.

But today, I want to concentrate basically on what fellowship in the Spirit means and at the basic level, all of us can enter into it, be conscious, nurture and develop.

**1 Corinthians 12: 12-14**

- 12 For even as the body is one and *yet* has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ.
- 13 For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.
- 14 For the body is not one member, but many.

This tells us that when we come before God in worship, in a spirit of repentance and faith, when we recognize the Lord Jesus as our Saviour, our Lord, the Holy Spirit who has been working in our hearts will then baptize us into the body of Christ, and we can then all drink of one Spirit. This brings us into fellowship in the Spirit. In the spiritual realm, all those who have genuinely repented, who have trusted in the Lord Jesus as their Saviour, have been united into one body.

So there is one goal, one direction; there is one God whom we worship. This is what brings us together. And this togetherness is manifested in being members of the body of Christ. We are united in that body. If we understand that, if we appreciate that, then we would do all things that we can to promote the health of the body. And if each one of us does that, the fellowship within the body will grow in quality.

All of us drink of one Spirit; all of us belong to the same body of Christ. If this is important to us, then our lives will move together. The fellowship in worship of God will deepen.

**1 Corinthians 12: 4-7**

- 4 Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit.
- 5 And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord.
- 6 There are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all *persons*.
- 7 But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

The common good tells us the same goal, the same direction. That is because we worship the same God. Fellowship in Spirit will then lead to the manifestation of the Spirit – the Holy Spirit will enable each one of us to **contribute in that direction**: to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

So if our hearts are not set on the common good, we will not have meaningful fellowship. If we are preoccupied with what we want for ourselves without regard to others, if we are not conscious of being a member of the body of Christ, then we will not be moving towards the common good and we may employ what God gives to us in the wrong way.

This is what happened to the Corinthian Christians. They had gifts of the Spirit: they came from the Holy Spirit, intended for them to work towards the common good. But instead, they employed the gifts in the wrong way. They were preoccupied with themselves, they wanted to be better than others, they enjoyed what they could do; they were not moving in the direction of worship of God.

So fellowship can be meaningful only if our hearts are set on truly worshiping God and whatever we have, whatever the Holy Spirit gives to us, whatever He enables us to do must be moving in the direction of serving God, honouring Him, doing His will.

The apostle Paul tells us: "...there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit." This helps us to appreciate: God does not want us all to have the same gift, to do the same thing. He wants us to have variations, varieties in terms of the gifts that we may have, but we must remember that these are from the same Spirit. They are meant to serve the same purpose.

If we are preoccupied with our gifts and especially if we want to compare with others, thinking our gifts are more important, we can do more than others then we are working against fellowship in the Spirit. Whatever gifts we may have, they are to be employed in the context of what the Spirit wants to accomplish in the body of Christ. When we do that, then we nurture fellowship in the Spirit.

There are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord. We have the same Lord, even though we may have different ministries, different areas of work that God may entrust to us to fulfil. If we love the same Lord and are conscious of that, then whatever we do will lead in the direction of a deepening worship of the Lord.

There are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all *persons*. God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit must be the focus of our lives. We must concentrate on what is important to Him, what He is seeking to accomplish.

It is the same God who works all things in all *persons*. There are varieties of effects or varieties of operations, but it is the same God.

So fellowship in the Spirit first and foremost must centre on fellowship in worship.

Let us go on to the next area: fellowship in prayer.



Fellowship in prayer brings to our attention the same burden, the same joy that we go through together, including spiritual warfare. We face difficulties, pressures as well as joys and pleasant times, but it is in a context of the evil one seeking to rule in this world. So there will be spiritual opposition, there will be a spiritual battle where we will have to fight against the spiritual hosts of darkness in the heavenly places.

So prayer is a very, very major aspect in fellowship. Without prayer, we are powerless. We may seek to overcome the evil one but if we are not dependent on God, we will be led astray, we will be overcome and we will instead become a tool of the evil one.

Prayer expresses our dependence on God. We worship God because we recognize He is the almighty, good and perfect God; He is worthy of our worship, worthy of our absolute allegiance and obedience, and we express our love for Him in prayer.

There are many different aspects of prayer but one major aspect in prayer is our expression of our need of God. We cannot live our lives by ourselves, even with all that God has already given to us in the natural plane. We cannot fulfil spiritual work by the energy of the flesh. We cannot fulfil the work of God without prayer.

The deepest burdens of our hearts should be brought before God in prayer. The greatest joys in our hearts should be expressed before God in prayer. The most difficult of spiritual warfare has to be waged in the context of the presence of God and His empowering.

The Holy Spirit must enable us to fight against the evil one. The sword of the Spirit, the Word of God, must move effectively through prayer.

So if we want to develop deep fellowship in the Spirit, then prayer is very, very important in our lives: prayer on our own in our walk with God and prayer together, especially when we seek to work out church life.

Without prayer, the things that we do will be like that of the people of the world. Many people can gather together and do many things. And the more intelligent you are, the more you may be able to do; the greater the number, the greater the financial resources, the more you may think you can accomplish.

But that is not true in the spiritual realm. In the spiritual realm, the greatest things are accomplished in the context of prayer, dependence on God, moving together with God, being led by the Spirit and in that context, we move and we do the things that God wants us to do.

**Acts 4: 23-31**

- 23 When they had been released, they went to their own *companions* and reported all that the chief priests and the elders had said to them.
- 24 And when they heard *this*, they lifted their voices to God with one accord and said, "O Lord, it is You who MADE THE HEAVEN AND THE EARTH AND THE SEA, AND ALL THAT IS IN THEM,
- 25 who by the Holy Spirit, *through* the mouth of our father David Your servant, said, 'WHY DID THE GENTILES RAGE, AND THE PEOPLES DEVISE FUTILE THINGS?
- 26 'THE KINGS OF THE EARTH TOOK THEIR STAND, AND THE RULERS WERE GATHERED TOGETHER AGAINST THE LORD AND AGAINST HIS CHRIST.'
- 27 "For truly in this city there were gathered together against Your holy servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel,
- 28 to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose predestined to occur.
- 29 "And now, Lord, take note of their threats, and grant that Your bond-servants may speak Your word with all confidence,
- 30 while You extend Your hand to heal, and signs and wonders take place through the name of Your holy servant Jesus."
- 31 And when they had prayed, the place where they had gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and *began* to speak the word of God with boldness.

This is an example of fellowship in prayer; and this occurred in the early days of church life after Pentecost, and the Christians were facing difficult times.

In the midst of their difficulties, they did not depend on their natural abilities, either to fight against the authorities or the governmental interventions, but they instead looked to God. They were persecuted by the religious leaders; they refused to comply with the instructions of the religious leaders to stop preaching in the name of Christ. And when they had been released, they went to their own *companions* and reported all that the chief priests and the elders had said to them. So they were threatened not to continue in that way.

When the Christians heard, they lifted their voices to God with one accord. They were united in their worship of God; they were prepared to take their stand together. And this stand was first and foremost made in their hearts in the spiritual realm, in their allegiance to God, in their affirmation, in their calling out to God.

They lifted their voices to God with one accord and said... They prayed to God together with one heart. And they brought before God what He was seeking to accomplish. Their prayers were not self-centred. They were not seeking for an easy time. They were seeking for the will of God to be fulfilled. And so we see the reference to the prophecy through David and how THE GENTILES RAGE... THE PEOPLES DEVISE FUTILE THINGS... THE KINGS OF THE EARTH TOOK THEIR STAND, AND THE RULERS WERE GATHERED TOGETHER AGAINST THE LORD AND AGAINST HIS CHRIST.

So they were living in a stage where this prophecy was being fulfilled and they had the intention to live according to what God intended. And so they prayed to God and asked God to intervene: "And now, Lord, take note of their threats, and grant that Your bond-servants may speak Your word with all confidence..."

They were not going to run away. If they were afraid of the authorities, they could have run away and hide but they were not going to do that. They would depend on God and they would speak the word of God with all confidence, confident that God would manifest His power in that context.

And God did. God heard their prayer.

As they came before God unitedly, God was pleased and so we are told: And when they had prayed, the place where they had gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and *began* to speak the word of God with boldness.

God answered their prayer. They were able to do what they had asked for. They asked God to intervene; God did. They asked God to enable them to speak with boldness and confidence and God did.

They were... filled with the Holy Spirit. As you have seen, being filled with the Holy Spirit is not the same as development of the fruit of the Spirit, but it can help us to move in that direction. The Holy Spirit came upon them; they experienced His power and this could then help them towards identification with what is in the heart of God in a deeper way and develop their lives accordingly.

So in prayer we can share the same burden, the same joy even in the midst of spiritual warfare. This is a great privilege that God has given to us but many Christians do not properly appreciate that because it is not so easy to work it out.

In the Scriptures, we see the apostle Paul again and again mentioned how he prayed for the Christians and how he often requested prayers for his ministry.

Even though he was already very effective, many people had turned to the Lord, the apostle Paul knew that this was possible only because God was present – He was working in that situation – and he needed to continue to depend on God and for God to continue to work in that situation.

Prayer is our lifeline to God. Prayer is the context in which the power of God will be released and manifested because we acknowledge Him, we worship Him, we express that we want His will to be done.

Why is that so important?

That is because God wants us to make our own choice. If we do not want God's ways in our lives, we can go our own way. God will allow us to do that and in many, many situations of life, He will not be working, He will not intervene because we want our own way.

So, if we want God to work in our situations, if we want God to intervene in a manner that is meaningful, then we must affirm it. We must tell Him we love Him, we want His will to be accomplished.

How much do we want His will to be done?

Why does the Lord Jesus talk about perseverance in prayer? It is because those who are serious in prayer, those who really want the will of God to be done, they will persevere in prayer.

But if the things of God do not mean very much to us, we may say a prayer here, say a prayer there and that is about it. Or when we are in deep trouble, we cry out to God for help and when He helps us, we soon forget. This is not the way that God intends for us to exercise ourselves in prayer.

So it is important for us, if we want to appreciate deep fellowship in the Spirit, then fellowship in prayer is a primary major aspect and we need first and foremost to develop that in our hearts, the meaning within us.

It is not just a physical coming together, it is not just a physical uttering of words, but it is the united hearts expressing their love for God, and dependence on God, that makes the difference.

The third area that we can consider with regard to fellowship in the Spirit is: fellowship in living.

Fellowship in living: one direction; complementary and contributory actions and activities; fellowship in times of joy and sorrow, spiritual opposition and spiritual victory.

How we live our lives, the manner in which we spend our time, what we concentrate on, the things that we do can be a context of deep fellowship or conflict.

This depends on our direction, it depends on our motive; it depends on our attitude – what we are seeking for.

**Philippians 2: 17-21**

- 17 But even if I am being poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I rejoice and share my joy with you all.
- 18 You too, *I urge you*, rejoice in the same way and share your joy with me.
- 19 But I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you shortly, so that I also may be encouraged when I learn of your condition.
- 20 For I have no one *else* of kindred spirit who will genuinely be concerned for your welfare.
- 21 For they all seek after their own interests, not those of Christ Jesus.

The apostle Paul in writing to the Philippians expressed how much he appreciated fellowship. He said: "...even if I am being poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I rejoice and share my joy with you all."

He was prepared to give up his life, to go through suffering, difficulties and pain in order to build up the faith of the Philippian Christians. He says: "I rejoice and share my joy with you all."

Then he told them, "You too, *I urge you*, rejoice in the same way and share your joy with me": fellowship in joy, fellowship in difficulties and suffering; moving together. They were able to share because of the same direction of life. They complement, they contribute to one another.

Then the apostle Paul made this statement: "But I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you shortly, so that I also may be encouraged when I learn of your condition. For I have no one *else* of kindred spirit who will genuinely be concerned for your welfare."

There were many Christians around Paul, but he singled out Timothy because he found in him a man of kindred spirit, someone with whom he could have deep fellowship with because of the attitude of his heart. He would genuinely be concerned for their welfare.

There are many people who may be concerned but with various different motives.

But Timothy was like Paul. He cared for them with a genuine motive of love.

"For they all seek after their own interests, not those of Christ Jesus." Here, I do not think the apostle Paul was saying that there was no one else amongst all the people he knew who was like Timothy, that all of them were seeking after their own interests. The likelihood is that he was referring to the people who were around him at that time; that Timothy was with him and he had confidence to send him because he was of kindred spirit.

How many people were with Paul we do not know, but the principle is there: The kind of fellowship that we can have of quality comes from the quality of our hearts.

The writer of the song “Blest Be the Tie that Binds” probably appreciated various aspects of this kind of fellowship. “The fellowship of kindred minds is like to that above”: If our hearts are together, and we live our lives with the same desire, same direction to really honour God and fulfil His will, and we love one another in the way God that desires of us, then the fellowship that we can have will be similar to that in the Godhead and the fellowship that we will have when we are in heaven.

So let us learn to appreciate what it means to live our lives in a way that will truly bring honour to God, be helpful for others and deepen the quality of our lives. Fellowship in the Spirit in living involves practical love and concern for the well-being of others. This we can see demonstrated as the apostle Paul gave his life as a drink offering upon the sacrifice and service of the faith of the Philippian Christians.

Let us go on to consider a situation where the Christians learnt to have fellowship in living.

**Acts 4: 32-37**

- 32 And the congregation of those who believed were of one heart and soul; and not one *of them* claimed that anything belonging to him was his own, but all things were common property to them.
- 33 And with great power the apostles were giving testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and abundant grace was upon them all.
- 34 For there was not a needy person among them, for all who were owners of land or houses would sell them and bring the proceeds of the sales
- 35 and lay them at the apostles' feet, and they would be distributed to each as any had need.
- 36 Now Joseph, a Levite of Cyprian birth, who was also called Barnabas by the apostles (which translated means Son of Encouragement),
- 37 and who owned a tract of land, sold it and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet.



Here we see fellowship in living in their day to day lives. They had their property, they had their occupations, they had their things to do, but as the congregation came together, as they believed and were of one heart and soul, they found it meaningful at that point of time to share what they had in the physical realm.

It says: not one *of them* claimed that anything belonging to him was his own, but all things were common property to them. So they decided to share what they had together.

This does not mean that all of us must do that if we are to have fellowship in living. The primary aspect here is to help us understand the attitude: the attitude of love and concern for one another, so that what we have we do not regard it as solely for ourselves, but what we have we are prepared to share with those who may have need if it is a meaningful context that the Lord desires of us to do so.

We cannot just because of this passage, therefore say that all of us must sell all that we have and distribute among ourselves and all have the same things. This is not the Scriptural teaching and we can see that in many other parts of the Scriptures. But this is a context where they found that to be a meaningful practice and so they did that.

And as a result: there was not a needy person among them and because of that, they could then concentrate on the spiritual.

If many of them were physically finding it very difficult to have enough to eat and they had to work very hard to do many things in order to have sufficient, it may be difficult for them to be able to spend the time together in fellowship, in working out together, in learning what the Lord desired of them. So in that context, it was helpful for them and they benefited.

So there can be meaningful fellowship in sharing what we have with one another so that we can all live well for the Lord, but in life, there are times when being in need, having difficulties, can be helpful for our development. So we need to appreciate there are many different aspects in life that can help us grow well.

**Philippians 2: 1-8**

- 1 Therefore if there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion,
- 2 make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose.
- 3 Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves;
- 4 do not *merely* look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.
- 5 Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus,
- 6 who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped,
- 7 but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, *and* being made in the likeness of men.
- 8 Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

I do not intend to go into detail on this passage but just to highlight two main aspects.

What will hinder fellowship is basically a life of selfishness, centred on our own personal desires without regard for others; what promotes fellowship is a spirit of self-giving for the well-being of others.

Related to this is that what promotes fellowship is a spirit of humility; what hinders fellowship is a spirit of pride.

And so we see here the apostle Paul tells us that in order to bring about something very meaningful (he says: “make my joy complete”) is to “...develop the same mind... the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose.”

And in order to do that, he says, “Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit...”

Selfishness will destroy fellowship. Selfishness means we concentrate on what we want without regard to others and often at the expense of others.

Empty conceit refers to our pride, not in things good or in the Lord but pride in ourselves, in our abilities, in what we have done; we may become arrogant, we show off, we think we are better than others.

But we are to maintain a spirit of humility.

And so he went on to talk about the Lord Jesus: “Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus...”

The basic attitude that comes through in the description of the Lord Jesus is a spirit of self-giving and a spirit of humility. Because the Lord Jesus was prepared to give of Himself for the welfare of others, He came into this world; He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

So in our daily lives, we need to be conscious: We are not living our lives in isolation, each one by ourselves for ourselves. We are living our lives in this world that God has created with fellow human beings and more significantly, after we have become believers and are baptized into the body of Christ, we are living our lives in the context of the body of Christ and we need to take care that we do not hinder the development of the body of Christ because of our selfishness, because of our pride and arrogance.

But we learn to nurture that fellowship by being genuinely concerned for the well-being of one another and exercising a spirit of humility in being prepared to do whatever is helpful in the eyes of God.

Another aspect that is helpful for us to be conscious about is that good fellowship, fellowship in the Spirit, can exist and continue to develop even when we are separated by physical distance and circumstances.

We see this in **Colossians 2: 5**.

**Colossians 2: 5**

For even though I am absent in body, nevertheless I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good discipline and the stability of your faith in Christ.

The apostle Paul had fellowship with the Colossians even though physically, he was not present with them in body. But he said: "I am with you in spirit."

The fellowship in the Spirit can continue in any situation if our hearts are together, if we truly love God and are united in living for Him and His will. The apostle Paul was at times in prison, but that did not hinder him from having fellowship with fellow believers; so too for each one of us. If we develop well, then fellowship can continue in whatever situation that we may go through and we can even deepen that fellowship even in times of separation.

However, times together in physical presence can be very helpful in nurturing fellowship.

**Luke 22: 28**

"You are those who have stood by Me in My trials..."

Fellowship in difficult times: very often, people think of fellowship primarily in pleasant times. We go out together for a meal to enjoy the time together; we play games - "we have fellowship". There is certainly a place for fellowship in pleasant times. But will we have fellowship in times of difficulties?

The Lord Jesus appreciated that the disciples stood by Him in His trials. In the midst of the difficult times He was going through, the disciples were basically with Him. However, there are higher levels of being together and standing together, which the Lord willing, we will consider in the next message.

But here, I want to emphasize that we must look at the issue of fellowship in a wholesome way. Fellowship basically means oneness, togetherness, commonness. So what is it that we value?

If at the heart of it, our commonness, our oneness is in terms of meaning, what is really good and meaningful before God then it will be present regardless of circumstances, easy or difficult. Whatever may happen, the fellowship will continue.

But if our fellowship is based on what we like, based on working out ideas of our own, based on what is more convenient; if that is our basis for fellowship then it will disappear very easily and even if it continues, it will not have eternal value.

So I want to make some comments finally on how we can nurture fellowship. Sometimes we may think, "I don't have very good fellowship with other people because I can't speak very well, I do not know how to socialize, my knowledge of things is very limited, I am not very popular. So I can't have meaningful fellowship with others. I see other people having good fellowship. They know how to talk, they know how to relate, they know how to laugh together, they are aware of things going on in the world, so they have very good fellowship."

This is not true.

True fellowship is not based on your ability to socialize, your knowledge of the things of the world or your popularity.

True fellowship resides in the heart. True fellowship comes from the values of your life; true fellowship comes from what is really important to you, what you have given yourself for, what you believe in, what you treasure.

So it begins with whom you worship, what you pray for, how you live your life. It centres on what is really meaningful to you in your heart.

If what is in your heart is good, truly good in the eyes of God; if you are walking with God, walking by the Spirit then you will certainly have fellowship with all those who do likewise.

But you cannot expect to have fellowship with those who do not want to live that way, who prefer the world, who prefer the things of the world, who prefer their own popularity, who prefer to do the things their own way. You cannot expect to have deep fellowship in such a context.

So we need to understand what is true fellowship.

True fellowship is in the Spirit, the result of walking by the Spirit. In such a context, we will rejoice always. Because we worship a God who is perfect, we can always rejoice in Him. We pray without ceasing because we need Him, we depend on Him; and our burdens we bring before Him, our joys we express before Him and so in everything, we give thanks. Whatever may happen in our daily life situations, we can give thanks to God because He is always good and there is a right direction in our lives and we are not disturbed by the things that take place.

So if we want to live our lives well and fulfil God's call in our lives, we must learn to nurture meaningful fellowship in the Spirit, seeking always to walk by the Spirit, to fulfil the perfect will of God.

So today we have sought to appreciate the importance of nurturing fellowship in the Spirit and we have considered three major areas that are important: fellowship in worship (one God and one goal), fellowship in prayer (the same burden, the same joy, including spiritual warfare), fellowship in living (one direction, complementary and contributory actions and activities; fellowship in times of joy and sorrow, spiritual opposition and spiritual victory).

The Lord willing, in the next message, we will consider spiritual fellowship, fellowship in the Spirit, at a higher level.

What God wants us to develop is not just to have fellowship but to develop fellowship at the highest level possible. It is such a wonderful thing but it is difficult.

So, ponder over it and consider how far you are prepared to go to develop fellowship in the Spirit. It has to be done in God's way and it will cost you everything. So, the choice is yours.

Let us, as we come before the Lord, ask Him to help us to ponder over our lives and to consider where we are going, whether we are moving in the direction of meaningful fellowship in the Spirit or we are living our lives day by day according to the ways of the world, our own thoughts, preoccupied with our own difficulties or what is so pleasant that we may encounter.

Let us ask the Lord to help us to live our lives in a way that will be truly worthwhile for eternity.