

MINISTRIES OF RELATIONSHIP

Dale Rumble (revised 11/93)

Being Built Together

In these days when so many Christians are ministry oriented, it is worthwhile to realize that it is possible for a church to have strong anointed ministry and yet see very little built that has quality or permanence. The Lord is doing more than raising up ministries! He is *building* His church! It is one thing to prophesy, counsel or preach, but it is quite another thing to have one's life built together with other Christians. We are being built together as living stones into a corporate body to express Christ's life to the world. This process requires the spiritual ministry of each believer. Just as a house is constructed by many different craftsmen, so the Lord's house can only be built properly if all the *workers*, materials and spiritual tools that He has provided are used.

It is important to recognize that the early church was built in homes or house gatherings. There were no official church buildings for over two-hundred years.

It is in our spiritual relationship as living stones that we become the Lord's dwelling place. When a house is built, the contractor first produces a suitable foundation to support the building. The body of Christ is much the same. Each one of us has been established on the Lord Jesus Christ as the foundation of our personal salvation. In addition, we are being built together collectively with other believers upon that same foundation into a local dwelling of God in the Spirit (Ephesians 2:19-22).

Apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers are ministries that equip and build us together on that foundation. The foundation and the pattern for His house must be correct. Paul speaks of his ministry as that of a "wise master builder," or architect. A church planter does not have liberty to build what he wants, it must be according to the pattern given in God's

word. Each believer is a vital part of the house, but only to the extent that he is built together with other members. A church will be no stronger than the bonds of His life uniting members together. These bonds are built by ministries that bring forth godly character and relationship. Next to our relationship with Him, I believe God is concerned more about our commitment to each other than anything else. There has been much emphasis on gifts of the Spirit, but God is speaking today concerning righteous character and committed relationships. We might be surprised how many times God works among us, not just to meet a need, but doing so in such a way as to build relationship between the parties concerned. Let us consider some of the ministries that the Lord employs to build His people together.

Ministries

All true ministry, in the final analysis, flows out of the life of Christ. However, His life is expressed in many different ways. The anointing of the Holy Spirit is the source of all variety and function, and *every* member has a role to play. It is convenient to classify ministry into three major groups. The first group is made up of the foundation ministries, whose roles are to establish churches and to equip believers. This includes apostles, prophets, teachers, pastors, and evangelists; from these men elders are appointed to oversee and shepherd the church. The second group encompasses the nine spiritual gifts given to believers by the Holy Spirit. I find it useful to define the third group as “ministries of relationship.” In a sense, all ministry will involve some degree of relationship. However, the first group tends to be more impersonal. Because of the interpersonal nature of the second and third groups of ministries, they are best developed in a small group environment (i.e. cell groups or house churches). Ministries of relationship involve the many ways believers work out in their lives together the truth they receive through preaching, teaching, etc. These interactions take place in the practical, “nitty-gritty” interactions that we go through every day in our fellowship with one another. Ministries of relationship are not passive virtues; they are actions that impart life because they come from the life of Christ within us. The Lord’s church is not a group of spiritual, but unrelated individuals. It is a group of very diverse individuals who have been born into the family of God and who have committed themselves to serve one another in a local fellowship. The following are specific, vital ministries that help build spiritual relationships.

Being Hospitable

Be hospitable to one another without complaint. As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. (1 Peter 4:9-10)

The early church was build largely through ministry in homes. The synagogues were primarily used for evangelism. In the informal atmosphere of a home, people can relate to others more easily. It is here that we begin to grow, and make-believe facades can be removed. In addition it is an environment where material things can be shared, and believers learn to serve one another.

The strong relationship of believers in the early church was established because they gathered in small groups, not once, but frequently during the week. It is wonderful to gather in a large assembly and express our identify as one body, but this does not remove the need to come together frequently in small groups.

I believe it is good for every assembly to begin as a house church where the initial core of believers can be well established in mutual relationship and with a common vision. When the meeting emphasis is only large gatherings, there is danger that relationship will not be established between people. A church is not strong simply because there are large numbers, much activity, and good preaching; relationships must be developed. Whether a home is used for a small group meeting, to provide shelter, or as a place to share food, in each instance it becomes a place of ministry. The starting point of home meetings is a family household properly established in the Lord. It must be a place of peace and order. Priscilla and Aquila had a church in their home wherever they lived. Hospitality was a key part of their ministry. God has given this opportunity in some measure to all who have homes. As He leads, we can also use our homes to reach out to those who are lonely, those who have no family or Christian relatives, or those who simply need an expression of love. Prayer meetings in a small home begin with hospitality. The church is not built only by “spiritual ministries”; it requires practical ministries as well. It is simple things such as table fellowship that God uses to bond believers together. To share our home is to share a personal part of our lives.

Being a Friend

We minister life when we share ourselves in acts of friendship.

Be devoted to one another. (Romans 12:10)

We are not only to be friends with the spiritually mature, but also with persons who are not really making it. Perhaps it is someone with many problems, or one who has even backslid. If their heart is still open to God, they probably need a friend more than a preacher. They may respond more readily to friendship than to a sermon. You may not know how to counsel the individual, but you can be a friend. There are certain things required in a ministry of friendship:

And Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness and he was called the friend of God . . . (James 2:23)

There has to be faith and trust in friendship. Abraham believed God, and God said, “You are My friend.” Be sincere with those you want to trust you, and they will accept you as their friend. This means that when they open their heart and confide in you, they are trusting a part of their life to you. It is not enough to give money or good advice, or even to give of our time; we must also give ourselves to others. This is true friendship.

When we can trust someone enough to confide in him, we consider that person a friend. We may not have all the answers, but we should be present whenever that individual needs help, and be willing to listen. If we are walking close with God, others can sense this in us, and be helped toward a relationship with the Lord through our friendship with them. The following scripture gives a picture of two different kinds of friends:

Suppose one of you shall have a friend, and shall go to him at midnight, and say to him, “Friend, lend me three loaves; for a friend of mine has come to me from a journey, and I have nothing to set before him”; and from inside he shall answer and say, “Do not bother me; the door has already been shut and my children and I are in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything.” I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his persistence he will get up and give him as much as he needs. (Luke 11:5-8)

This particular person was a friend to one who came asking for the bread. However, he didn’t have any bread, but because he was a true friend, he said, “I’ll go to my other friend, and get some from him.” But this sec-

ond friend says, “Hey, don’t bother me—the wife and kids are in bed, and I’m cold, and I’m just not going to get up.” However, the real friend was persistent, and finally the man did get up and give him bread, which was taken back to his visitor. This is a picture of true and superficial friendship; true friendship will cost us something. Friendship doesn’t necessarily mean that you will always like the person concerned. There may be reasons why you would prefer not to do what is required, but if you are a true friend, you will go and get bread. The second friend did not contribute anything toward building relationship, even though he did supply bread.

Many times the most important thing one can do as a friend is simply to be present when needed, being careful not to gossip, teach or criticize, but to listen and give encouragement. You will then be seen as a friend, and your words will be life to the one in need.

He who covers a transgression seeks love, but he who repeats a matter separates intimate friends. (Proverbs 17:9)

If we repeat some things even when they are true, our words can separate friends. Therefore, if we are going to win friends, we must learn to keep our mouths closed, our ears open, and our hearts pure. Gossip, in the end, will always destroy friendships.

There is another aspect of friendship:

Faithful are the wounds of a friend . . . (Proverbs 27:6)

To be a true friend, there will be times when we must offer correction. I have friends who corrected me in the Lord, and it was their sincere concern in doing so that proved their friendship to me. A true friend can come on the basis of relationship and expect us to receive his correction (even though it may hurt at the time). The Holy Spirit will provide the necessary guidelines in a ministry of friendship. One such guide is knowing when to be present, and when to stay away. We can become obnoxious by being around too much; a busybody is often an over zealous, misguided friend. We must realize that all problems are intended to draw the party concerned closer to the Lord, and therefore our friendship must *never* take the place of the Lord in the person’s life.

Showing Mercy

A very important ministry of relationship is that of “showing mercy.”

. . . he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness. (Romans 12:8)

The ministry of mercy is not intended primarily for friends, but for neighbors, enemies and even for those who persecute us. Mercy is to provide a bridge by which relationship can be established between us and those needing Christ. The account in scripture of the good Samaritan is an excellent example of this ministry (Luke 10:30-37). There is not a single person in the body of Christ who does not have grace to minister mercy because each one of us are Christians through the mercy of God. Since we have received mercy, God expects us to minister it to others. In this way, mercy often becomes the first step toward building a relationship with the Lord by those who do not know Him.

Remember the prisoners, as though in prison with them, and those who are ill-treated, since you yourselves also are in the body. (Hebrews 13:3)

Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. (Matthew 5:7)

Why does the Lord desire mercy more than sacrifice? Well, whatever a sacrifice might cost one to give, it does not do anything to establish relationship. But to show mercy is to build relationship. For example, to show mercy by visiting the sick, people in prisons, widows, orphans, and to do so not considering whether or not they are worthy of our time, is to help them build a bridge of relationship to Christ. To those who may be hardhearted, an expression of mercy can open a door for the Spirit of Christ to touch their lives with the reality of His love.

Helping Others

An important ministry that can build relationship is that of “helps.”

*And God has appointed in the church, first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healings, **helps**, administrations, various kinds of tongues. (1 Corinthians 12:28)*

“Helps” is a vital part of every deacon’s ministry. Not everyone with the ministry of helps is a deacon, but I believe every deacon has the ministry of helps since it is a supporting ministry for the whole church. Elders can only be effective to the extent they are supported by the help of men and women in the assembly.

*. . . the household of Stephanas . . . have devoted themselves for ministry to the saints . . . you also, be in subjection to such men and **everyone who helps** in the work and labors. (1 Corinthians 16:15-16)*

“Helps” is one way to share in another’s ministry, and we are able to “help” in more ways than we imagine. For example, we help by sharing with others the natural things that God has given us, such as money, trade skills, our time, as well as any service that we willingly give to support to the church. Suppose there were five people in the church who could do all the ministry perfectly. Since all needs would be met by these five, everybody else could sit back and do nothing. In that case, there would be very little relationship established or a building of lives together in the body. Therefore, God sees that individually we are deficient. As each one then supplies what he, or she, has been given, needs are met and relationships established, and we more clearly recognize our need for one another.

God had a purpose for each one of us when we were in our mother’s womb, and He deposited in us certain skills and latent talents. These are the tools of our “help” ministry in the church. The ministry of “helps” is a vital part of *all* life activity in the church. Women are a rich blessing in their roles of “helpers” in the church.

I commend to you our sister P{hoebe, who is a servant of the church . . . that you help her in whatever matter she may have need of you, for she herself has also been a helper of many, and of myself as well. (Romans 16:1-2)

Greet Mary, who has worked hard for you. (Romans 16:6)

Indeed, true comrade, I ask you also to help these women who have shared in my struggle in the cause of the gospel, together with Clement also, and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life. (Philippians 4:3)

More than better deacons or better elders, a church needs the *whole* body to function. There is a delicate balance of priorities required in the ministry of helps. This is seen in the story of Mary and Martha. Martha was so help-oriented in the horizontal dimension that she neglected her vertical relationship to the Lord. Our relationship to the Lord has to *always* be first. One New Testament family who practiced a balanced ministry of helps was Aquila and Priscilla. They were a consistent help to Paul’s ministry; and no doubt many deep relationships of the early church were established in their home. Whoever would aspire to any directive ministry in the church should see “helps” as a valid starting point. Philip helped at tables; because

of his faithfulness, he later became an evangelist. Twenty-five years later we find him with a church in his home, and his family functioning with him in ministry. It all began with the ministry of helps related to the needs of some women. Over the years my wife and I have been greatly helped in our ministry by those who assisted us to care for our mentally handicapped son.

Blessing Others

We can build relationship simply by speaking well of others, by blessing them with our words.

Bless those who persecute you; bless and curse not. (Romans 12:14)

. . . when we are reviled, we bless . . . (1 Corinthians 4:12)

One meaning of the word blessing is, “to speak well of.” Someone might raise the question, “Can I speak well of that person? How are they in the Lord? Do they really obey Him? do I wait till they appear to be walking righteously before I speak well of them?” But the commandment says to speak well of those who persecute you. It doesn’t say to only bless those who are walking with the Lord. God has ordained that His people inherit blessings through His grace. Blessings that we do not deserve. The lesser is blessed by the greater (Hebrews 7:7). When we receive blessings from God, He expects us to bless others in turn. That is the principle of blessing. When we see a brother or sister who is not walking as they should with the Lord, the tendency is to be critical of them. There is a time to correct, but there is also a time to bless. We do not have to honor what they are doing wrong, but we can bless that which is good in their life to encourage them. For example, we may know a brother with deep problems in his life, but we can say, “Praise the Lord, brother, the testimony and scriptures you gave the other night really encouraged me.” We encourage and bless him in that which is good, not pointing to what is lacking. It can be a challenge to bless those who persecute us. To bless when you are reviled lays a foundation to build relationship. Jesus called little children to Himself and blessed them. I don’t know what really happened, but I suspect that a relationship was started that God honored and worked out later in their lives. A primary purpose God has in all His dealings with us is that in the end He might bless us. These blessings flow out of our relationship with Him. Husbands and wives are committed to each other by their marriage relationship, which is deepened as they bless one another.

Not returning evil for evil, or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead; for you were called for the very purpose that you might inherit a blessing. (1 Peter 3:9)

It requires faith to bless someone when their shortcomings are clearly evident.

By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau, even regarding things to come. (Hebrews 11:20)

It doesn't take faith to speak evil of somebody, or even to speak truth. But it requires faith to bless because blessing is based on the future.

Rejoicing and Weeping with Others

There is ministry in “rejoicing and weeping” with others.

Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. (Romans 12:15)

This speaks of personal involvement where we identify with others by sharing their sorrows and joys.

That there should be no division in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another. And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it. (1 Corinthians 12:25-26)

To rejoice or weep with others is to identify with them in the depths of their emotion. For example, the richness of another's ministry is something we should rejoice in. By doing so, we identify with and support that person. If God uses someone else rather than us to minister, we are not to sulk or be angry. Instead, we should encourage that person by rejoicing for them and thereby build relationship. I encourage young Christians to rejoice with one another in the development of their ministries so that they grow and mature by mutual encouragement.

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. And you too, I urge you, rejoice in the same way and share your joy with me. (Philippians 2:17-18)

When I rejoice as a person, my whole being participates. I clap my hands, joy is in my heart, and my mind is thinking of good things; everything in me is rejoicing in harmony with the words of my mouth. An as-

sembly should rejoice in the Lord in the same manner with each member participating. True worship not only honors the Lord, but it encourages and strengthens others to do so as well.

Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things again is no trouble to me, and it is a safeguard for you. (Philippians 3:1)

When saints gather together, the first objective is to rejoice in the Lord. You may say, “That sounds good, but I really don’t know what I can rejoice in today; I have nothing but problems.” Well, rejoice in the Lord anyway! Our eyes are to be on Him, not on our problems. Thanksgiving should be the basis of beginning every meeting. We rejoice in the Lord, not in circumstances.

*Rejoice in the Lord **always**; and again I will say, rejoice! (Philippians 4:4)*

The joy of the Lord is our strength, and rejoicing in Him is to be our lifestyle.

We should also weep with one another in times of grief and affliction. What happens when you go to someone in sorrow and pour out your heart in comfort and sympathy, weeping with them? Confidence and relationship are established between you. As a result, bonds of love are strengthened. When great sorrow arises from an event that seems to spell defeat in someone’s life, there can be a maturing in that person if their sorrow is embraced by the compassion of another.

Now we who are strong ought to bear the weaknesses of those without strength and not just to please ourselves. Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to his edification. For even Christ did not please Himself; but as it is written, “The reproaches of those who reproached Thee fell upon Me.” (Romans 15:1-3)

One thing that will hinder the building of quality relationships is pride. It is possible to be proud and be unaware of it; when we are too timid to speak, or afraid to show our emotions, it can be pride that hinders us. We may say that we are too shy or humble, but it is often pride that prevents us from sharing emotions with others.

Being a Comfort

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort; who comforts us in all our afflictions so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. (2 Corinthians 1:3-4)

The Holy Spirit is our Comforter. We reflect His nature when we minister comfort to others. To have this ministry, we must be prepared to go through trials in order to experience the comfort of God. Through this we learn how to comfort others. Our problems and distresses in the end become the means of ministering comfort to others. We cannot give something to someone that we do not possess ourselves. Once we have experienced the lifting of a heavy burden in our own life by the Lord, we are encouraged to fulfill the law of Christ by bearing the burdens of other believers.

Being a Peacemaker

One of the most important ministries for establishing relationship is being a peacemaker. Some may think a peacemaker is one who comes between warring parties and stops the fighting. They equate God's peace to an armistice. However, His peace comes only as His government is established in hearts. Peace is not an absence of war, but the active presence of God's government in lives. His kingdom is love, joy and peace.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. (Matthew 5:9)

God is a peacemaker for He sent His Son to reconcile rebellious and sinful mankind to Himself. As His children we are to be like our Father and pursue peace with all men. When an open rift exists between two brothers, there can arise a root of bitterness that will defile others. The role of peacemaking is to bring each heart into submission to the Lord, who is the Prince of Peace. The issue is not necessarily determining whether one party is right and the other is wrong, but rather that they both submit to the Lord's government. Everyone in the church can have a ministry of peace if their life is under the government of Christ. A child can be a peacemaker at home, just as a parent can be a peacemaker between children. The first place in the church the enemy seeks to attack is leadership; he attempts to

divide the overseers so they would be unable to function together. One reason for plurality of leaders is to ensure that each one is shepherded by his brothers from the wiles of the devil so that the peace of God among them is protected.

*But the wisdom from above is first pure, then **peaceable**, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy. and the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace. (James 3:17-18)*

It may require many difficult circumstances, testings and dealings of God in our lives in order to develop the gentleness, mercy, and wisdom we need to function as peacemakers. When we attempt to bring peace without these virtues, all we do is meddle; our spirit must be groomed with peace.

Being an Exhorter

We can develop and strengthen relationships with others through exhorting and encouraging them. Not everyone is a pastor or teacher, but every member of Christ's body can bring forth the word of God to encourage and exhort others. We may all have the spirit of prophecy, but only a few will have the gift of prophecy and even fewer yet are prophets. In the same way there will be degrees of exhortation. At first one may only share a verse of scripture, or a simple testimony of what God has done in his life. As one grows in Christ their words will become more substantial. In time, they will give directive exhortation as their words become more specific than general. Their exhortation will speak to what is needed in certain lives, and thereby build relationship with them. Exhortation is a supplement to the teaching ministry of the church. It is vital to keep such a ministry as exhortation. We can only minister according to the measure of grace given us. Exhortation can in time grow into a public ministry of the word, but this must come from the anointing of God.

Therefore encourage one another, and build up one another . . . (1 Thessalonians 5:11)

The place to begin exhorting is on promises from His word that God has made real to you. When God reveals a truth from the scriptures, it is made known to the church. Relationship is built as we are faithful to speak the word that God gives us, so that others can be edified by it. If I have a personal need, and God quickens a verse of scripture to someone concerning my need. As he brings forth the word and I am helped, I will have

greater confidence in that person since God has used him in my life. Thus, I become more closely related to him.

And beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity. And let the peace of God rule your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful. Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. (Colossians 3:14-16)

And let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more, as you see the day drawing near. (Hebrews 10:24-25)

Breaking Bread Together

When we were born into the kingdom of God, we entered into a Father-son relationship. The significance of that relationship is often not real to us at first, and only later through spiritual growth in our lives do we begin to cry out, “Abba, Father,” when this father-son relationship becomes established in our hearts. Relationship with other believers in the church is much the same. Our first concept of being a part of a local body is that of “joining a church.” However, we soon learn that much more is involved. We are related together as members of a living organism. We are to be “bone of bone” and “flesh of flesh” with one another. Since our natural tendency is to go our own way, God begins to deal with this spirit of independence. “Just me and Jesus” is *not* the way of maturity. He works to bring us into a dependent relationship with others. A cementing of lives together can take place at the communion table once the significance of this service is understood. We cannot partake if there is anything in our heart against another brother or sister. Breaking bread together in a communion service is a very important practice for home church meetings (Acts 2:46). It is a time of celebrating our life together around the Lord who has made us one body in Him. If people are being saved, and the church is growing in numbers, we are prone to say that all is well. On the other hand, God looks to see how well relationship is being established among His people. Are they being conformed to His image? Do they love one another? Is there true fellowship between the members? Is the emphasis of ministry centered around the person of His Son (Hebrews 1:1-2)? These are the important measures of growth.

Since there is one bread, we who are many are one body; for we all partake of the one bread. (1 Corinthians 10:17)

Walking in Humility

Water flows downhill. God's river of anointing flows down upon the lowly and humble.

Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor. (Romans 12:10)

Pride of any kind will hinder our fellowship with others. Ministries of relationship can only occur between parties who do not think too highly of themselves.

Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself. (Philippians 2:3)

. . . all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble. Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time. (1 Peter 5:5-6)

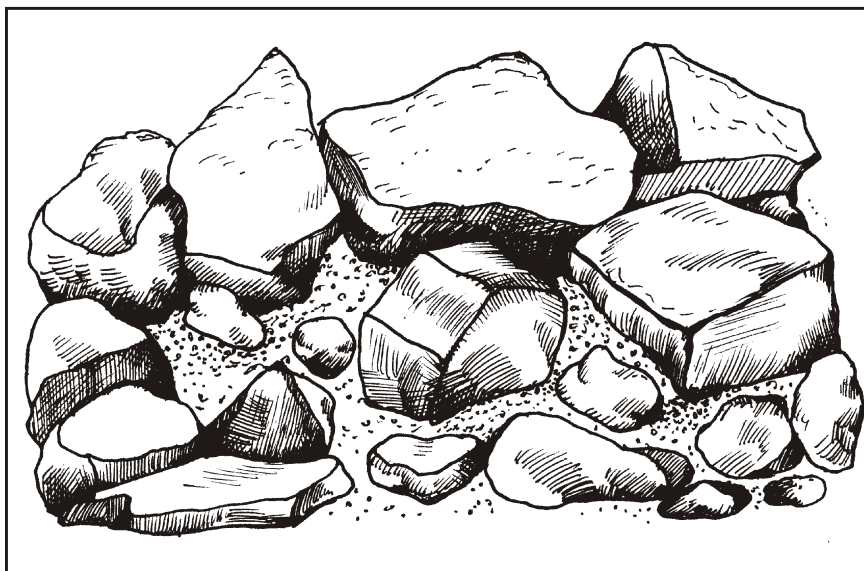
We require God's grace to minister life to others, and it takes grace to receive input from others, especially from those who "rub us the wrong way." He gives us this grace as we humble ourselves before Him and submit to one another. Humility does not just apply to spiritual things, but also to all the practical affairs of everyday life. Until we come to a lowly place we will not be fruitful in winning the confidence of others. Just as pride will destroy godly relationships, so humility is the valid starting point for developing a ministry of relationship.

Shaped, Fitted and Bonded Together

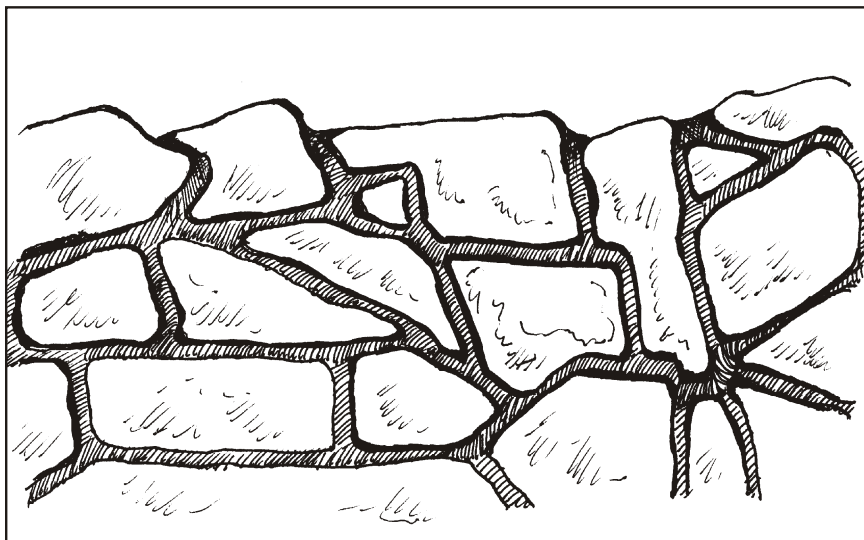
You also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house . . . (1 Peter 2:5)

The following graphic illustration shows what takes place as converts to Christ are built together by fellowship and relationship into local expressions of the body of Christ. The following verbs, when combined with the words "one another," express the relational dynamics by which

At Conversion



When Relationships Have Been Built



members are bonded together in Christ: be devoted to one another; be kind to; be honest with; encourage; bear with; forgive; pray for; confess to; serve; care for; be patient with; show preference to; comfort; admonish; honor; bless and build up. These are the ingredients of the divine cement that bonds believers together in relationship, qualities that are best developed in a home church environment.

From whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by that which every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love. (Ephesians 4:16)

Conclusion

. . . . Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone in whom the whole building being fitted together is growing into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit. (Ephesians 2:20-22)

Our whole life, both the secular and spiritual, can become a ministry that reaches out to build relationships with others in the church. We are not to only acquire passive qualities of character, but we are to release these virtues in ministries of life to others. That which we are taught through the foundation ministries and read in the word of God, we are to practice in ministries of relationship. This is how the church is built.

FOUNTAIN OF LIFE PUBLICATIONS

No copyright restrictions. Tracts may be copied.

Offerings will be gratefully appreciated..

71 Old Kings Highway • Lake Katrine, NY 12449

(845) 336-7333

For this tract and others download from

www.thefountain.org