

Chapter 13 - Connect with Others

1. Take a few minutes to reflect on the story.
 - A) When we think about the daily lives of people in less technological cultures, we see a much greater emphasis on community. Think about how technology leads us to live independent, even isolated, lives. What are some other contributors?
 - B) John went from living in the closely knit community of the early church to being exiled by Rome. We all have different levels of comfort on the scale from introversion to extroversion. This would affect our response to a change of that kind. How would you feel about it?
 - C) God designed us for community. None of us can survive alone independently as we can in community. Think about some of the ways that other people have enriched your life, physically, emotionally and spiritually. Consider how others have benefitted from your fellowship.

2. You will have noticed that some of these *19 ways to boost your spiritual life* seem to be opposites. Earlier, we looked at the importance of solitude. Now, we're thinking about fellowship. The fact is that the Christian life holds several pairs of opposites in balance. Consider the life of Jesus, noticing in particular the solitude/fellowship ratio of His time. Make some notes about what you observe.

3. Some churches stress the idea of "membership," while others emphasize the concept of "fellowship." Either way, they imply "community." Write down a few benefits we get from community, then note some of the things which might fall into the "cost of community" category:

Benefits of Community

Costs of Community

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(I should point out that even the “costs” can be “benefits” as well. For example “giving up control” benefits us by teaching lessons in humility and service.)

4. Think about your own community of faith and identify some of the things that hold you together.

5. Write down at least two examples of situations in which your connection with other believers was a particular blessing. (Think about emotional or spiritual support, wise counsel, generosity, rebuke, prayer, and so on.)

6. No community of Christians is perfect. Think about a time when fellowship within your church was disturbed. What was the *real* cause? (Sometimes the “presenting symptom” of a problem is not the real problem, but a consequence of the real problem.) What did you learn about preserving fellowship in the future from this situation?

7. Identify the stages of maturing fellowship. (There is no “official” list to try to match.) What stage do you think your community of faith is at? What would be the best “next step?” How could you quietly, yet effectively, play a role in deepening the level of fellowship in your church?

8. In the “Potential Pitfalls” section, I mentioned Bonhoeffer’s reference to “the pious fellowship” as a hindrance to “real fellowship.” What other hindrances to fellowship have you observed? What steps could be taken to reduce or overcome their negative effect?

For Group Leaders:

With your small group setting you have the perfect environment to workshop the ideas set out in this chapter. Take advantage of the insights provided by your group members and work them through together.

As you uncover strengths and weaknesses in your church, celebrate the strengths and work together on the weaknesses. (For example, if your group recognizes that your church tends to lose its teenagers, make yourselves accountable to each other to reach out and integrate them into the church family.)

To avoid developing a negative “cliquishness” in your group, try some shared activities with other groups inside and outside of your church. Help your group members to enjoy fellowship within the broader body of Christ.