

Re-Thinking Fellowship

By Ken Larson

In the book *Reveal* which documents findings of a Willow Creek Church survey they hypothesized that:

Spiritual friendships are a key driver to spiritual growth. Meeting the need for connection and genuine spiritual relationships is crucial to spiritual growth. Yet organized efforts to create these environments appear to be effective only in the earlier stages of spiritual growth. (p. 57)

I thought about how we “do” church and small group especially concerning how we try to help people make lasting relationships that are meaningful. The typical meeting regardless of type usually goes something like this.

1. We assemble together at a stated time and small talk for a few minutes.
2. The meeting is called to order and someone reads a scripture, book, or presents something prepared.
3. We break into smaller groups and talk about what we heard – learned and then ask if anyone is in need.
4. The people in need swallow hard and share about what is troubling them. We give them some Bible verses and interpretation of what it might mean to them.
5. We may pray for them.
6. We all go home and go on with our lives.

Nothing wrong with any of this. It is usually beneficial to all who attend. Unfortunately after doing this for fifteen to twenty years I wanted more. I like some of the people in the Reveal study was looking to have more involvement with people and more impact in “ministering” to others.

I went on a quest to at least get better answers if not a solution. Approaching fifty I thought is this all there is to Christianity? I was very happy as a Christian. I had been richly blessed. I liked the church I was in. I had been on the Church board, lead home group, taught Sunday School, and presented seminars. I tithed. I was very happy to be a Christian. I was just looking to have more impact on people’s lives.

What did Jesus think that Christianity was? How did he define it? He was asked in Matt 22:36 the greatest commandment. He answered, my paraphrase, “Love God. Love your neighbor.” Willow Creek says Love God, Serve others. He goes on to say that is all the law and the prophets. Get this right and you have the whole package.

As I thought about it, it seemed to me that we had forgotten the second part. When we fellowshiped with our brothers toward the end of the meeting we would tell them to Love God, keep his commandments, and hoped that God would “show-up and make it all work. I didn’t think that I was doing the second part of loving the individual who wanted help. I was not walking with him and helping him process his need. I cared and cared

deeply but I didn't want to get involved in working toward a solution to help him with his problem. I wanted to pray, leave it to God and move on. Not a bad thing. Just not what the verse said in my thought process.

I needed some new vocabulary to frame my thoughts.

How relationships develop?

Acquaintance - the first part of the meeting where I was able to meet fellow believers and make small talk to see if we “connected” and if we wanted to continue the relationship.

Fellowship – This happened in the typical meeting when we shared our needs. The fellowship was when the groups listened, gave information and prayed hoping God would solve the problem presented

Life-Walking – This is my new word and where I think the *action* of Christianity is. This is where I see the “serve others” part is. Where I talk to the person looking for help and I say, “I want to walk with you on this. I want to process this with you. I want to pray this through with you till you have an answer or I may need to “send you” to someone else with more expertise.

An example might help. I had known a friend for fifteen years. Knew his family. Had been in small group and Adult Education with him for almost that long. During the fellowship time (my definition) he started to talk about how much he disliked his job. He desired to be a Christian Life Coach. I listened to this for many years wondering if he should be so “honest.” He seemed stuck. Finally I decided I should do more. I needed to Life-Walk with him. I suggested we do an Opportunity Season with me. I was trying the concept and had a copy machine “book” that I was looking at. It changed both of our lives in just twelve weeks.

The concept is simple. I would call him daily on the way to work, five days per week for twelve weeks (a season). A longer call by phone or sometimes for breakfast once per week.

He worked on a:

- Body Opportunity - More skiing.
- Soul Opportunity - What to do about his current job.
- Spirit Opportunity - How to be a Christian Life coach.

I worked on a:

- Body Opportunity – Better eating
- Soul Opportunity – Calls at work to Estate Attorneys
- Spirit Opportunity – Getting a publisher for *Opportunity Season*.

We both had a great experience and moved our opportunities forward. We have moved a so – so relationship to one where we Life-Walk when we talk (usually once per month) and rejoice in one another's success and minister deeply on needs.

Fast forward. Many people are finding that Life-Walking is where that action is. Processing life together is the way we were designed. God has chosen to enter our situation is life through others. There are many ways to Life-Walk. *Opportunity Season* (Tate Publishing) provides a simple structure and road map to facilitate Life-Walking. For more information on Life-Walking or Opportunity Season visit www.life-walking.com or www.opportunityseason.com

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