

## What are the traits for foundational fellowship in your groups?

As we continue and wrap up this look at what true fellowship is in a small group, we will dive into the final three foundational elements of mercy, confidentiality and unity. So, let look at these and see if they are in your group life.

Is their mercy happening in your group? Mercy is one of those aspects of group life that I always need to work on. If I have accomplished a feat in life, boy, I think everyone should have it nailed down tight. So when I see people struggle with something I've got a grip on, why can't I treat it like something I haven't worked the discipline through? Colossians 3:13 is a brutal scripture for me. It says, "You must make allowance for each other's faults and forgive the person who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgives you, so you must forgive others." (NLT). Not only do I need to make room for these people who may not measure up, but if they offend me, I also need to forgive them...ouch! Why lord? Well, 2 Corinthians 2:7 (CEV) gives us good insight. "When people sin, you should forgive and comfort them, so they don't give up in despair." So now I need to deal with them, forgive them and help coach them through this...wow. So, in your small group, if you want to see mercy played out, you can follow these three steps. First, make allowance for others faults. Your starting point is to realize they aren't at the same place you are. (Keep in mind; they are further ahead of you in other areas.) Next, forgive them if they offend you. It may or may not offend you. Even if they et under your skin a little bit, forgive, forgive, forgive! Finally, instead of guiltting them or making them feel less than you; you are to encourage them so they don't get discouraged. Come along side of them so they can break the cycle they are in. Mercy not only puts up, but makes up for the place they are in.

Is their confidentiality happening in your group? Jesus knew people far better than us. And he knew we would need help dealing with the fallen nature each one of us possesses. He also knew what would destroy trust more than anything else. In Matthew 18:15-17, Jesus speaks to one of the most slippery sins, gossip. Jesus tells us if we have a problem with someone, go to that person. Don't go another person, go to that person. For some reason, we like to go to everyone but that person, but Jesus says, go to the person you have a problem with. Now if you go to that person and you still have the problem, you should bring someone with you for the second try. If you still have the issue and it isn't resolved, then bring the church (leadership) into the resolution process. Remember, saying "if you promise not to tell anyone, then I can tell you" is a form of gossip. If your group just gets this aspect of group life, you will be miles ahead. Gossip is what breaks confidentiality, damages trust and hurts the people you care about. Some scriptures to mediate on are these Proverbs; 4:24, 11:13, 16:28, 17:4, 20:19, 25:9 and 26:20. Titus 3:10 in the NLT sums up Jesus' teaching and says, "If anyone is causing divisions among you, give a first and second warning. After that, have nothing more to do with that person." Another great rule of thumb is, if you aren't part of the problem or solution, you need to keep quite! That's a nice way to say "shut up and don't gossip!"

Is their unity (of purpose) happening in your group? I am not talking about thinking alike, that is uniformity. My small group can differ on subjects and issues, but we have unity. It is okay to have diversity, if you have unity. Sometimes you just have to agree to disagree. 1 Corinthians 1:10 (NLT) says, "Let there be real harmony so there won't be divisions in the church...be of one mind, united in thought and purpose." Sparks may fly in your group. Things may get uncomfortable in your group. But as long as unity is the overriding virtue, your group will

grow more united through health discussion. Things such as politics, debating style of your services, critiquing the pastor's sermon are all things that prove to de-unify than unify. Minor doctrinal issues (things theologians haven't settled on in centuries) can also be stimulating conversations, but left without a purpose, can lead to disharmony. The purpose of the group keeps the group healthy and unified.

So, look back on these 10 foundations of fellowship in your small group. Where are you strong? Where do you need to grow? Then get your group together and commit to these ten:

1. We will make our group a priority (frequency)
2. We will share our true feelings (authenticity)
3. We will encourage our spiritual growth (mutuality)
4. We will respect our differences (courtesy)
5. We will support each other in times of need (sympathy)
6. We will accept our weakness (humility)
7. We will speak the truth in love (honesty)
8. We will forgive when hurt happens (mercy)
9. We will keep confidences (confidentiality)
10. We will support our purpose (unity)

“May the Lord make your love grow and overflow to each other...so that you may stand before him guiltless on that day when our Lord Jesus Christ returns with all those who belong to him.” 1 Thessalonians 3:12,13 (LB)

Cheryl, add links to part 1 and part 2 here...