

# FELLOWSHIP: YOUR REDEEMPTIVE CONNECTION

Five Guiding Values

## 1 John 1:5-7

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Jim grew up in a wealthy family. When he was nineteen, he got married. A divorce and bitter settlement ensued. Jim believed that his wife seduced him to get his money. Jim brooded over this. His siblings developed successful businesses, but Jim wandered from job to job. When I met Jim, he also wandered from church to church. He would come a few Sundays and then disappear for a year or so.

Once, we drew Jim into a small group. Inevitably conflict arose. Jim read most disagreement as rejection and felt belittled. As a result, Jim's grip on reality slipped more and more. One day he gave a sympathy card to Sheila, a group member, to pass on to her sister whose husband had recently died. In the card Jim not only extended sympathy; he said he was available for marriage. Sheila had opportunity to read that. She did not want to hurt Jim, but she did not want to deliver the card. Her sister was dealing with enough and not ready for a marriage proposal. When Sheila returned the card and said that, Jim left. He hit the road. He only communicated to us through condemning letters and notes. Jim could speak about the love of God and neighbor, but his fear of rejection isolated him in a private world of misery and loneliness. If you'd say

that Jim was crazy, you'd be right. He lacked a grip on reality that most of us have. However, in his small, isolated world, he was rational. Every thought had its logic.

The craziness we identify in Jim exists to varying degrees in all of us. Eve was crazy when she believed the serpent over God about *the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil*, yet her path seemed logical to her. Adam was crazy when he took the fruit as well. **Both Adam and Eve had to surrender their grip on reality to sin.** Indeed, sin is craziness because sin relies upon deception. Sin always believes and acts in deception. *Sin requires us to see and think in a fantasy world, a world where God's love is discounted and God's truth is ignored.*

Mindy suffered that craziness. As a child, her Dad ran her into the ground. He called her stupid, lazy, good-for-nothing. He also accused her of horrible, shameful acts. Those words settled deep into her spirit and produced an insatiable hunger. She could not get enough of people. She swallowed them up in her need for attention and affirmation. If people did not pay her enough attention, she thought they disliked her. Everything she saw in people's actions was about her. "Do you know me?" she would ask. Her behavior was frequently disruptive. She would disrupt meetings by interrupting whoever was speaking with questions, stories and platitudes. Her need for attention and validation led to multiple broken marriages and social isolation. Yet, unlike Jim, Mindy began to change. What changed Mindy was Jesus working through her Christian sisters and brothers. God filled them with mercy and boldness. They welcomed Mindy, affirmed her value, endured her disruption, and yet frequently confronted her. With love and truth they poked holes through the walls of her tiny world, so that she could see what had been

hidden. God made those believers partners in Mindy's redemption. Increasingly, Mindy was grasping God's love for her. She was also discovering her value.

The Bible teaches that there is a great war over what we human beings think. It didn't end with Adam and Eve. It started with them. St. Paul told believers to resist being pressed into the mold of this world. Instead, he called us to be transformed by the renewing of our mind, by a change in the way we think. He said that when that happens our lives will show what God's good and perfect will is (Rom. 12:2).

There's craziness sewed by the devil in our thinking, feelings and actions. That craziness shows up in emotions like worry, depression, bitterness, jealousy, lust and loneliness, and in many destructive actions that create trouble and cause us shame.

A stockbroker named Bill W. and a physician named Dr. Bob realized that there was a craziness causing them to drink and drink and drink. They were drunks ruining their lives and they couldn't stop. A pivotal moment arrived when they admitted that they were powerless over alcohol and that their lives had become unmanageable. A second critical step was the moment when they actually believed that Jesus could overcome their craziness and restore them to sanity. Consequently, they decided to turn their will and lives over to his care. Those were three of the twelve steps they took and later laid out for other alcoholics. (You can see those twelve steps in the sermon insert.) Steps 4 through 10 were all acts of confession and repentance. In step 11 they sought to improve their conscious contact with God and to obtain power to fulfill God's will. Their final step was to share their pilgrimage with other strugglers and to apply these principles

to every aspect of their lives. Even though, the struggles these men faced were very personal, God led them to a companionship with one another in experiencing healing.

That is the plan of God. The Apostle John writes:

*God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin* (1 John 1:5-7).

John told believers that when they walk with God, He leads them into fellowship with one another. That is exactly what happened with Bill W. and Dr. Bob. They found companionship in their struggle and a complete renewing of their thinking and actions. They were being remade through confession, repentance, forgiveness and a growing connection with God. The blood of Jesus, in a time consuming process, was purifying them from the craziness, from every kind of sin. That is also what happened with Mindy.

John reminded believers that God is all light. There is no deception, there is no evil, and there is no dark side to God. When you walk with God, you find that God is all light. When you fellowship with God, you experience light. You experience his love, his patience and tender mercy. You taste his generosity and grace. He leads you into companionship with other believers who taste that love and grace. And like waves of water that progressively cleanse dirt away from a body, the blood and forgiveness of Jesus progressively expose and remove all sin, all craziness.

Are you enjoying the bright and heart-warming light of God? Are you grateful for God's patience? Are you thrilled with His forgiveness? Has he led you into an honest companionship with believers, a companionship that encompasses your personal struggles? That is the plan of God. We are to be priests and ministers to one another.

Jesus' brother James urged believers to not only confess their sins to God but also to one another so that they would be fully healed (James 5:16). Do your Christian companions help you experience forgiveness? Are you finding healing in their company?

God has used Christian believers again and again to punch holes in my fantasy world and let the light of truth come through. Believers have been so instrumental to my growth because God has given them patience, tenderness and boldness. At times my shame has been exposed and I have been flush red fearing condemnation. Instead, arms of my Christian brothers and sisters have come around me, tears have been shed and prayers have gone up. Once again, the tenderness and patience of your Father and mine has been revealed.

I can't imagine any wholeness without that kind of connection with God's people, without tasting your sisters and brothers' priesthood. How I hurt for people who are isolated from that channel of God's love!

No matter how hurting you are, no matter how hopeless, no matter how guilty, fearful or bitter, God's ready to tenderly wrap you in his arms and pierce your dark world with his light. He has the fleshy arms of your Christian sisters and brothers ready to embrace you. Are you ready for them?

Jesus has a gift for you today. His spirit has entered into the lives of those who repent and believe, and he has mobilized them to serve you. Will you embrace that redemptive connection?