

Fellowship Face to Face, Part 2

Donald S. Whitney

Until well into the twentieth century, most relationships existed within a short distance—perhaps even a short walk—from home. Contact with friends, family, church members, merchants, and others typically happened face to face and took place in stable communities. Today, we can do much of our job, communicate with friends and family, bank, shop, buy gas, and pay bills, and never come within shouting distance of another human being. Because of our increased mobility, we live so far from the people we do see at work and church that we never see them any other place or time. We can't pretend this has had no effect on relationships, including fellowship between Christians.

What can we do? First, recognize what's happening. With all its benefits, one of the special challenges of our age is learning to adapt to a world where everyday contact with real people is diminishing. Technology has brought far-flung friends and family closer to us, yet it doesn't bring them close enough. We can read or hear their words, but we cannot shake their hand, kiss their cheek, or sit beside them and talk. Technology even permits us to have frequent contact with strangers, but it can estrange us from those nearest to us.

Recognize not only the tendencies of technology to separate us, but also how relationships weaken when urban sprawl and thickening traffic increase driving time and stress. Once home, and the drawbridge of the garage door closes us into our castle, just the thought of hurrying off again and driving several miles—even though to gather with other believers—is often too exhausting to consider.

Second, resist the socially centrifugal forces that push us apart. Beware the temptation to sit at the computer or engage in electronic chats at the expense of face-to-face fellowship. We shouldn't be content merely to *watch* relationships and begin to

“know” the people on television better than our nearest neighbors or almost anyone in our church family.

Third, understand that such resistance probably requires being more intentional about face-to-face Christian fellowship. Participate in the aspects of church life that involve more than just sitting and listening. Don't rush off after church events. Linger and talk, especially about the things of God. Eat together with other church members whenever possible. Look for ways to have people from church in your home every month or two.

Hebrews 10:25 is a timeless and God-inspired reminder to maintain some simplicity about getting together with believers. Like the original recipients of this letter, we also need the basic exhortation about “not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some.” It was the pressure of persecution that tempted the first readers of these words to give up gathering with other believers. Technology, distance, and the pace of life are more likely causes for isolating ourselves from other believers today. But our God-given need to meet with Christian people face to face, and the God-glorifying purposes of such gatherings remain unchanged by time or culture.

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