

Introduction

Review the concept of "means of growth" and discuss those covered so far (Acts 2:42). Remind the students that the Means of Growth are biblically prescribed avenues through which we receive the life changing power of God. Remember that it is one of three aspects of [walking in the Spirit](#).

We come now to another means of growth, —*fellowship*, or Body-life. This means of growth is not well understood in the church today. "Fellowship" (*koinonia*) means "sharing." We are to share the life of Christ with one another. Spiritual growth has a corporate context.

Fellowship stands in stark contrast to the radical individualism of our culture which often finds its way into "American Christianity." Church is incorrectly defined as a building or the service we attend. "Fellowship" occurs in a hall next to the sanctuary, or people participate in the "ritual of fellowship" (card passing down the pew or shaking a neighbor's hand during the service). Therefore we purposefully distance ourselves from these wrong perceptions of church and choose "body life" as a term that more accurately reflects the New Testament picture of fellowship.

A key question arises: **"How involved in Christian fellowship should I be?"** What is the biblically normative level of involvement in the Body of Christ?

The typical answer is "Attend church worship service on Sunday mornings." In Xenos, this sounds like "Attend [central teaching](#) weekly." Others believe fellowship is defined by the number of committees on which I serve. These answers are inadequate. If this is the extent of our involvement with other Christians, we will be seriously stunted in our spiritual growth, probably seduced by the world, etc. Instead we must see how the New Testament answers this question. There is a big difference between "going to church" and "being in fellowship."

For many of us we'll have to challenge our upbringing; our past experiences in the local church; and our culture. For ALL of us, we'll have to challenge our priorities and our agenda in life.

To answer this question, we need to go to the New Testament's description of our new identity in Christ.

1. Involved enough to live consistently with our [new identity](#) (1 Cor. 12**; Rom. 12**)

Let's take a brief look at the importance of **the vertical aspect of being "in Christ" — our union with Christ**. Our standing before God is based on the fact that we have been "put into" Christ; 1 Cor. 12:13 —review baptism by Holy Spirit — Him indwelling us and simultaneously placing us into Christ.

What is our identity? Forgiven, Accepted, and Secure in our relationship with the Creator of the universe. Our greatest needs have been met by God. This is our new identity.

This is a *positional* truth—we didn't feel it happen, but we believe it on the basis of God's Word ("CONSIDER") and choose to act consistently with it ("PRESENT") in our dealings with God (e.g., DRAWING NEAR IN SPIRE OF GUILT FEELS AS PER HEB. 10:19ff.). As we do this, we begin to grow and experience God's love and acceptance (LEARN >> ACT >> EXPERIENCE).

But having a new identity also has a **horizontal aspect**. God has not only changed our standing with him, he has also changed our standing with other Christians. Our new identity makes us members of one another (1 Cor. 12:12-14; Rom. 12:3-5).

1 Cor. 12:12 For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ. 13 For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. 14 For the body is not one member, but many.

Rom. 12: 3 For through the grace given to me I say to every man among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith. 4 For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, 5 so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.

Therefore, we need to believe this on the basis of God's Word ("CONSIDER") and choose to act consistently with it in our interactions with other Christians ("PRESENT"). If we don't, we will miss out on the growth God offers. Nowhere does the Bible describe a growing Christian who isn't involved in the Body of Christ.

This interaction involves two distinct aspects:

- **We need to regularly receive the life of Christ from other members**
1 Cor. 12:21>>contrary to AUTONOMY; INDIVIDUALISM; Normally, we learn this lesson first.
- Then, **we need to regularly give the life of Christ to others**
1 Cor. 12:15,16 >> Giving love does not come naturally. Most people are naturally self-centered and we see it manifested in behaviors like:
Believing that others are around only to serve us.
Judging relationships based on how that person makes me feel
Expecting others to be sensitive to my needs and disappointed when they are not.
or - "I'M INSIGNIFICANT". "I don't have anything to offer anyone in a friendship that they could want. I'm worthless."

The Body of Christ is a key provision for growth from God by which our understanding of Christ is deepened, where we have the opportunity to express Christ's love to others, and where we personally and often intimately experience the love of Christ.

Therefore, we need to be involved enough to receive and give the life of Christ. Now that we understand the theological basis for Body-life, we can move to more practical ways to incorporate this into our lives. Jesus gives us a similar answer with a little different spin.

2. Involved enough to "Love one another as I have loved you"

(Jn. 13:34,35) "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

Explain Jn. 13:34,35. Note the same two-sided involvement—giving love to other Christians and allowing other Christians to give love to us.

The disciples were committed to this imperative from Jesus and therefore committed their ministries to living this out. Their epistles unpack this command through several "one another" imperatives. NAME THEM:

- Gal. 5:13 For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.
- 1 Thess. 5:11 Therefore encourage one another, and build up one another, just as you also are doing.
- Col. 3:16 Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another . . .
- Jas. 5:16 Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed.
- Eph. 4:32 And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.
- Eph. 4:2 . . . with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing forbearance to one another in love . . .
- Rom. 15:7 Wherefore, accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God.
- Gal. 6:2 Bear one another's burdens, and thus fulfill the law of Christ.

Are we involved enough to know others' concerns, worries, and burdens?

- Rom. 12:10 Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor . . .

Devoted: tenderly loving; showing affection. (Rom. 16:18)

- Rom. 12:16 Be of the same mind toward one another; do not be haughty in mind, but associate with the lowly.

We will look at two of the key ones next week: encourage and admonish.

What does this have to do with how involved we should be in fellowship?

We should be involved enough that we are receiving and giving this kind of love from and to other Christians on a regular basis. This assumes an intensive level of involvement with a relatively small number of people. How could we possibly accomplish this if our only context for knowing

people was a large group meeting on a Sunday morning? These biblical principles of body life require being in a small setting of people.

- How can you encourage someone unless you're involved enough to know where and when they need this?
- How can they encourage you unless you are open enough for them to do the same?
- How can you admonish someone unless you're involved enough to know what they need to be admonished about?
- How can they admonish you unless you're open enough for them to do the same?
- How can you show forbearance and forgiveness unless you're involved enough that they offend or irritate you?
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Structures that facilitate this kind of involvement:

- *Home groups* are meant to facilitate this. This is the example of the New Testament (Acts 2:42,46,47; Rom. 16). While they do not assure Body-life involvement, they provide a context within which to build these kinds of relationships that go on through the week.
- *Cell/study groups*: This is an even smaller context for getting to know people in your home group, building friendships that carry through the week.
- *Fellowship after Central Teaching*: Evangelism-focused home groups at the College and Main Campus central teachings wisely use the time after the meeting to fellowship. Deliberate effort is made by the church to provide an environment that makes it easy and fun to stay after the teachings for a while and hang out with one another. It is a great opportunity for guests to see and experience John 13:34,35 in a manner that won't happen if the group just gets up and goes home after the meeting. If we have no guests that week, it is a great opportunity to build depth with other members of the body of Christ.
- *Time outside meetings*: e.g. — regular one-on-one time with others (breakfasts, lunches, hang out at someone's house, etc.). This is where discipleship usually occurs. There is time to study the Word together, pray together, discuss personal issues, and get to know one another on a deeper level.
- *Ministry houses*: Living with Christian roommates provides an excellent context for learning and practicing Body-life.
- *Retreats*: Many people experience Body-life for the first time on a weekend retreat when people can get a sustained dose of it.
- *Praying with others in your home group*: There is something about talking openly to God with others that binds you closer together around Christ.
- *Vacations with others in your home group*: Experiencing new things together, coupled with additional times for sharing and prayer add a whole new dimension to vacations.
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Can a lifestyle of self-giving love be fulfilling?

The world views this lifestyle of giving oneself for the good of others as madness, but God calls us to this (Phil. 2:3-5*).

Phil. 2: 3 Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself; 4 do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. 5 Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus,

This is the paradox of self-giving love, or "ministry as a means of growth." We actually receive as we give. *We are never commanded in the Bible to evaluate how well others are doing in their "job" of loving us!* That view comes from our "consumer society" — how well are others serving me? We are commanded to love others in the power of Jesus Christ based on His love for us. We don't wait until we get all our problems fixed before we give. Often we use the excuse — "I'm too messed up emotionally and relationally to give to someone else." "I'm going through some

hard times in a relationship, at work, at school — I can't give to someone else until these are cleared up!!"

God has uniquely designed the cure to our many hang ups through the paradox: "I'll change you as you serve others." As we give to others we will be fulfilled by God, as He "fixes" me up. So often it is an act of faith— I *feel* acutely in need yet *choose* to act in love toward others, *trusting* that God will meet my needs.

Illustrations:

A healthy physical body is the result of EXERCISE AS WELL AS NUTRITION.

THE DEAD SEA is dead because minerals and nutrients flow in, but it has no outlet. These minerals could sustain life, but the Dead Sea cannot support life because the nutrients are so concentrated. In the same way, Christians will not benefit from the spiritual nutrients that God supplies if they are unwilling to love others and practice what they learn. A vital relationship with Christ requires both receiving his love and giving it away to others.

Jesus prioritized this lesson with his disciples:

Jn. 4:34 - Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to accomplish His work.

He modeled it by witnessing to the woman at the well. He was fed by serving her in this way. He told them that such ministry was a "food" they did not know about.

Jn. 6:1-13 - Jesus therefore lifting up His eyes, and seeing that a great multitude was coming to Him, said to Philip, "Where are we to buy bread, that these may eat?" (6) And this He was saying to test him; for He Himself knew what He was intending to do. (7) Philip answered Him, "Two hundred denarii worth of bread is not sufficient for them, for everyone to receive a little." (8) One of His disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to Him, (9) "There is a lad here who has five barley loaves and two fish, but what are these for so many people?" (10) Jesus said, "Have the people sit down." Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, in number about five thousand. (11) Jesus therefore took the loaves; and having given thanks, He distributed to those who were seated; likewise also of the fish as much as they wanted. (12) And when they were filled, He said to His disciples, "Gather up the leftover fragments that nothing may be lost." (13) And so they gathered them up, and filled twelve baskets with fragments from the five barley loaves, which were left over by those who had eaten.

Next, he put them in a situation in which they could discover it for themselves. Notice that as they gave to others (in the midst of their own need), they found their needs met as a result (Twelve baskets full corresponding to the twelve disciples).

Jn. 13:1-17 - Now before the Feast of the Passover, Jesus knowing that His hour had come that He should depart out of this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end . . . (3) Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come forth from God, and was going back to God, (4) rose from supper, and laid aside His garments; and taking a towel, He girded Himself about. (5) Then He poured water into the basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded . . . (12) And so when He had washed their feet, and taken His garments, and reclined at the table again, He said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? (13) "You call Me Teacher and Lord; and you are right, for so I am. (14) "If I then, the Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. (15) "For I gave you an example that you also should do as I did to you. (16) "Truly, truly, I say to you, a slave is not greater than his master; neither is one who is sent greater than the one who sent him. (17) "If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them."

Based on believing in the sufficiency of his Father's love for him (vs 1-4), Jesus modeled it again for them (while they were arguing about who was greatest), then he told them they should do it with each other, then he delivered the point in vs 17 (*makarios* means "fulfilled").

Acts 20:35* - ". . . remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"

Whereas the world teaches that we will be happy when we get other people to love us the way we want them to, Jesus teaches that we will be fulfilled when we learn to love others the way he loves us. If we believe that we will be happy only when others love us, we will live in utter bondage. Then we will allow our fulfillment/happiness to be controlled by others. We must realize that people will never be equipped to meet our needs. Only Christ can provide true fulfillment.

Qualification:

Many times Christ would take time to rest and eat (and taught his disciples to do the same) — e.g. Mk. 6:31. He would not wait for all needs to be met but rather understood that our finite nature and our call to be stewards of all our resources (including our physical and mental capabilities) required rest. Rest enables us to go the long distance for Christ. If we do not have the ability to say "no" at any time, we will ruin ourselves and our families.

Most of us are not apt to give too much, but are selfish. We are committed to our rest and comfort and need to recognize our selfishness as a barrier to spiritual growth. We need to commit to a servant lifestyle and learn balance in our finances, schedule, vacations, etc. as we serve God. See pp. 38-39 in your book [Loving God's Way](#), by Gary DeLashmutt.

Common barriers to healthy Body-life

1. *Culturally glorified autonomy* ("Needing other people is a sign of personal weakness.")

(1 Thess. 3:1) Therefore when we could endure it no longer, we thought it best to be left behind at Athens alone . . .

Paul viewed being without Christian fellowship as the last resort.

Are you embarrassed to ask for help?

Do you recognize that God may communicate his wisdom to you through other members of the Body of Christ? We need to value the counsel of those who know God's word and learn it so we can help others grow.

2. *Codependence* ("You must meet my needs" vs. "God meets my needs, sometimes through you or others.")

(Phil. 4:10-19) But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at last you have revived your concern for me; indeed, you were concerned before, but you lacked opportunity. (11) Not that I speak from want; for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. (12) I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need. (13) I can do all things through Him who strengthens me. (14) Nevertheless, you have done well to share with me in my affliction . . . (19) And my God shall supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus.

Paul is thankful for their help, but makes it clear that he draws his life from Christ.

What's wrong with this statement: "I am taking care of George (a young Christian)?"

3. *Super-spirituality* ("Involvement with other Christians hinders my intimacy with Christ.")

(1 John 4:19,20) We love, because He first loved us. (20) If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen.

You don't really love Christ if you aren't involved with his people.

(Col. 2:2,19) . . . that their hearts may be encouraged, having been knit together in love, and attaining to all the wealth that comes from the full assurance of understanding, resulting in a true knowledge of God's mystery, that is, Christ Himself . . . (19) (The false teachers are) not holding fast to the head, from whom the entire body, being supplied and held together by the joints and ligaments, grows with a growth which is from God.

Autonomy can lead to doctrinal imbalance.

4. *Materialism* ("I'm too busy with my career/schooling/hobbies/house to be this involved with other Christians.")

(1 Jn. 2:10,15) The one who loves his brother abides in the light and there is no cause for stumbling in him . . . Do not love the world, nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

Loving the values of the world-system is contradictory to loving one another with God's love.

(1 Jn. 3:14-17) We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love abides in death. (15) Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer; and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. (16) We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. (17) But whoever has the world's goods, and beholds his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him?

Note how John prioritizes relationships with other Christians over hoarding material goods.

Is this a valid excuse, or is it a statement of your priorities? What are you willing to sacrifice for your spiritual growth? Keeping a time-log will reveal how you really spend your time and perhaps clearly demonstrate your priorities.

5. *Tribalism* ("We are so busy with my children's [sports, music, etc.] that we don't have time for fellowship." Or "God first, my family second, church third . . ." or "My family is my ministry").

Eph. 5,6; Col. 3 – Paul speaks first of our identity as brothers and sisters in the Body of Christ, and then addresses our various social roles (including family roles). His point is that healthy family life is based on and must be rooted in vital involvement in Christian fellowship.

The Bible does not set these priorities or dichotomize these two areas of our lives. We should serve God in both contexts. Involvement in Body-life is necessary for a healthy home, just as healthy home life affects our impact on the Body of Christ.

Qualifications:

There may be times, particularly during family crises, where God calls on us to reduce our normal involvement in ministry in the church in order to take care of family needs (e.g. missing fellowship due to a child's illness, or more long term crises).

Even when we are considering structural changes during the life of our church, this is taken into consideration. Many home groups have changed to every other week to accommodate family ministry due to increased family needs.

6. *Moral impurity* (Often manifested by withdrawal from fellowship &/or complaints about the church.)

(1 Jn. 1:7) . . . but if we walk in the light as He Himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another . . .

Note the connection between close fellowship with other Christians and responding to God's moral guidance.

Sometimes, this is what keeps Christians from ever getting involved in Body-life. Other times, this is why we leave fellowship or distance ourselves from close relationships. Young Christian workers seem to rarely consider this cause when a younger Christian they are working with begins to withdraw.

7. *Rebellious attitude* ("Who are you to tell me what to do/how I should act?")

(Heb. 13:17) 17 Obey your leaders, and submit to them; for they keep watch over your souls, as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you.

This comes to light when leadership calls for change, or when other Christians correct us. Whether or not we are rebellious is determined not when we agree with authority figures, but when we disagree. If we must have things our way, we have a problem (as long as the authority is operating within the parameters of scripture). We should realize that authority and discipline are expressions of love (for our benefit), rather than tools to exploit us.

(Heb. 12:6,9,10) Those whom the lord loves he disciplines, and he scourges every son whom he receives . . . (9) Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us . . . (10) they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good, that we may share His holiness.

The author acknowledges that our earthly parents did not always deal with us properly, but this is no excuse to refuse to submit to God's discipline. Often times, rebelliousness is a reaction against unrighteous authority figures (e.g. unfair or abusive parents, employers, etc.). Authority figures can be unrighteous by being too permissive or too strict.

8. *Shy or introverted* ("I'm just shy and introverted." "I'm just not a people-person.")

(2 Tim 1:7) For God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power and love and discipline.

Spiritual Gifts

As we are involved in Body-life and practicing Christian love, God will eventually reveal certain ministry strengths. These are called spiritual gifts. Scripture teaches that all Christians have at least one spiritual gift (bestowed at conversion). Gifts come in various combinations and degrees. (1 Cor. 12; Rom. 12; Eph 4:7-11; 1 Pet. 4:8-11).

We shouldn't become obsessed with discovering our gift(s), as though doing this is somehow the "key" to our spiritual life. Rather, we focus on being involved with other Christians and practicing the "one another" imperatives. We can rest assured that God will reveal our gifts.

As we discover our spiritual gifts, we have opportunities to use these gifts not only in the context of our closer fellowship relationships, but also with people we do not know very well. In this way, we can build up the Body of Christ.

Xenos facilitates the discovery and deployment of our spiritual gifts. In [Unit Four](#) we will learn more about spiritual gifts. Our Ministry Fair helps us find [MINISTRY TEAMS](#) which can utilize our gifts. It is not uncommon for people to be involved in more than one ministry team.

Discipleship

As you learn about God and begin following him, he will give you the opportunity to help younger, hungry Christians learn how to walk with him (Col. 1:28,29; 2 Tim. 2:2). We call this ministry [discipleship](#). This is one of the most exciting ministries God offers us, and we believe that God calls all Christians to this ministry.

In the context of a close (mentoring) relationship, we meet regularly (often over several years) and practice the "one another" imperatives with them. We are committed to helping them in their spiritual vitality, character formation and ministry development. These folks often become some of our closest friends, and eventually become our colleagues in ministry.

NOTE: Healthy discipleship takes place within the context of involvement with many other Christians. God normally uses many different Christians to disciple us in different areas over a period of years. Beware of disciplers who want to minimize your involvement with other Christians.

Body Life (Receiving & Giving Christ's love) as it relates to the other means of growth

The Interaction of Body-Life (Receiving Christ's Love) With the Other Means of Growth	
Prayer	The church is to be a praying community. By precept and example, prayer plays a central role in the life of the church. Others can stimulate us to love and good works (Heb. 10: 24,25), including by prayer. By establishing regular times to pray with others, we can strengthen our prayer habits, while gaining the discernment of the other members. Prayer is the spearhead of the church's ministry; opening doors, producing conviction in the hearts of those who hear, protecting those reached from Satan and granting spiritual empowerment to Christian workers.
Scripture	The church exists to accomplish ministry, both to its members and to the world outside the church. Ministry carried out by myself is never as impactful as that accomplished with others. I need to learn to disciple (train) others so they can carry on the same kind of ministry. I may have to be disciples myself before I can be effective at ministry, and this is best accomplished in a healthy local church.
Discipline of the Holy Spirit	When we are undergoing difficult times of spiritual discipline from the Lord, Christian fellowship is sometimes the only thing that keeps us from falling apart. We were never meant to undergo significant breaking without the support of a loving community. At the same time I receive support, I have the opportunity to give support and to coach young Christians on how to understand God's hand in their lives during trials.

The Interaction of Body-Life (Giving Christ's Love)

With the Other Means of Growth	
Prayer	Those who are strong in ministry know how many times their ministries have spurred them on to intense periods of prayer. It is hard for such people to imagine what it would be like to feel the obligation to pray, but without the natural and healthy motivation created by ministry. As ministers, no longer are we merely praying because it's the right thing to do, or because we hope we can feel better as a result. Instead, there are real tasks to accomplish through prayer in the lives of others. Those who are established in defined and personal ministry consistently demonstrate more appreciation for prayer than those who are lacking this vital means of growth.
Scripture	When others are looking to us for guidance and help in their Christian walks there will be a new urgency in our study of Scripture. This is because as discussed earlier, Scripture holds the key to successful ministry. Feeding young believers the Word of God is basic to most kinds of ministry. Even service oriented ministry should be carried out in light of the Bible and should include the use of Scripture.
Discipline of the Holy Spirit	Spiritual discipline is largely intended to make us more effective in ministry. At the same time being in ministry will cause us to experience maximum benefit from discipline. We regularly find that those who are tied into extensive ministry are prepared and able to endure the necessary suffering to be conformed to the image of Christ for the sake of those people who depend on their ministry. Those who are not active in ministry find it too easy to run in the face of painful discipline.

Charts from, Dennis McCallum, "[Walking in Victory](#)," pp. 140, 157.

Memory Verses

Rom. 12** and 1 Cor. 12** - Christians are members of the Body of Christ and therefore members of one another. This is the basis for interdependent involvement with other Christians.

Phil. 2:3-5* - God calls on all Christians to practice a lifestyle of sacrificial, self-giving love.

Acts 20:35* - Giving sacrificially to others is a key means of fulfillment for