

# Food and Fellowship

## (Going Hand in Hand)

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### Intro

A few months ago we as a pastoral staff had begun to take a close look at the current state of church life, both within our local communities and even on a national level. And what we saw was an overall decline in church attendance nationally, particularly among the youth. (Some of those statistics Pastor Bruce shared with you last week.) And the reason for this decline of interest in church has multiple factors which we will share with you over the next few weeks.

But what was interesting is that **not all churches were in a state of decline** amongst the new generations. We were able to see some churches that were defying those negative statistics. Churches that were growing across the generation lines. We saw that those churches who were growing did so because they, as a church body, had understood and developed ways to achieve **strong, deep personal connections**. **Let me repeat that...**

Now we here at GCCC have obviously been striving year after year to bring our church family closer together, and we really are one of the churches who is to be admired for how well we have done for so many years. But with all the things that we saw through our research, we realized that **where we are in this this period of our history... is not where we want to be in our near future**.

Things have to change now....or we will become just another negative statistic. And what has to change is our attitude of **“More means better!”**

We unknowingly fell into the trap that the more we did, the more we added, the more ministries we had, the more events we put on ....the stronger our church would ultimately become. But the reality was...We didn't really see the connections we had hoped for.

The reason being...**it's extremely difficult to bring about connection through complexity.**

**And that's what we did!** We became too complex in how we did church with everything grabbing for your attention at one time. And our relationships with one another suffered from **too much of everything**.

## Overload!

You see I believe that there is already an overload of things bombarding each and every one of us every day. We have so much thrown at us with every glance at our **cell phones** or our **smart TVs** or **digital billboards with rotating advertisements** that emotionally... we shut down.

And it's not just church...

- Concert sales are down
- Movie sales are down
- National Football attendance is down
- College football attendance is down
- Major league baseball attendance is down
- NASCAR is down
- Pro Wrestling is down
- Monster truck rally's

And on and on...

All these things are showing a decline nationally because people have had too much of everything and they are mentally overloaded. Nothing excites them anymore - **they've been exited to death.**

And so people are generally losing the desire to interact with one another because they have become "closed off" and therefore... escape to their own "virtual worlds" filled with all their pleasures and interests and especially ... All their virtual "friendships" through things like....social media.

Social media is the new fellowship of this generation. Young and old alike across the board have bought into it. It's a simple world because they can control it.

Conversations that are controlled, friendships that are controlled where if you step out of bounds, you are **unfriended.**

But scripture warns us not to go down this fake virtual road because it leads to nowhere.

**Slide 1:** *Hebrews 10:24* - And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds,

**Slide 2:** not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another —

**Slide 3:** and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

We see that this day that scripture was referencing has arrived!

It's what I call: **Anti-social media...**

Think of this....Facebook was created to allow students at Harvard to interact and connect in a digital world.

But then...this college-based website rapidly expanded and as of the second quarter of 2018, Facebook had **2.23 billion monthly active users**. Why?

**Because People crave connection!** But the connections they found...they control.

For instance ...social media had easily become a personal "echo chamber," where we only hear voices who agree with us. If someone says something we don't like, we block them.

The problem is, as difficult as real relationships can be, there's an emotional benefit to disagreements and is worth stepping out of our comfort zones to allow it into our lives. Sometimes the only way to grow is to allow those with differing viewpoints to speak into our lives.

**Proverbs 18:2 - "A fool takes no pleasure in understanding, but only in expressing his opinion"**

The application of this passage is obvious, isn't it? Social media has magnified this kind of foolishness. We all want to share our opinion, but we don't want to listen. We don't want to understand. We just want to be heard and it's unhealthy.

**Forbes: Since loneliness is linked to a myriad of health and mental health problems (including early death), getting real social support is important. Virtual friend time doesn't have the therapeutic effect as time with real friends.**

Even though most people fear being alone, those same people unknowingly isolate themselves from others through their devices and it may only get worse.

### **Where we are heading**

We are heading to self-driving cars and digital robotic care takers, which will combine with delivering restaurant apps and amazon door to door drone delivery! So it could become entirely possible to go weeks without having a face-to-face interaction.

*(Discuss the television/family dilemma)*

Went from radio which the family would sit around and still be engaged to one

another because they were listening. Then the TV made it so that they wouldn't be looking at each other now they are watching a box. And the fear was that it would hurt the families. Then it turned out where it was no longer a family TV now we had TVs in our own rooms and it further separated families. Now think of it... We bring the TV with us everywhere we go. You can't even sit in a doctor's office without immediately grabbing your phone and going off with your own world. Forget family. No human interaction itself has been affected.

### Summary:

And so here we are as a church battling against people's technology, battling for people attention, devising ways to draw them into a healthy church environment but unfortunately, all too often we **just added to the noise.**

We became too complex and forgotten that church is simpler and more meaningful than that.

### What is church?

Church is commonly defined as a building used for public worship. Many people refer to a church as an organization, but that is not the biblical definition.

The Bible teaches us that WE are the church. That the Holy Spirit lives in us and we are the temple.

And Jesus...well He is the chief cornerstone of that Temple. You see...It's about people! It's about relationships!

Not this building made of wood, stone and steel. The church is made of flesh and bone filled with the Holy Spirit. Without people connecting with people There is no church.

### Kirk

It's interesting and sobering to consider that the word "church" isn't in the original Greek manuscripts. The word comes from the Old English and German word pronounced "die kirche." (Keer ch'eh). In Scotland and Northern England it was pronounced "kirk". (So Captain Kirk is actually captain church.)

So what is the definition of Kirk? **The word means "pertaining to the lord."**

And what we do here GCCC certainly was always done because it pertained to the Lord.

But the original Greek word that was used was much deeper than this. It is the word ECCLESIA-ek-klay-see'-ah- which means **to assemble for an express purpose.** Its root meaning is people coming together and fellowshiping first

and foremost.

We assemble with the express purpose of Sharing Christ, connecting people and serving others.

- Not for being entertained
- Not for being wowed
- Not to get through the next week

We assemble with an express purpose of sharing connecting and serving. And one way that this can be better achieved is to step back and get to know each other and fellowship through smaller, more intimate, less complex groups!

**That's the reason I believe in small groups.**

To me I found the strongest church bonds within our small group. I love our small group. Dez and I would look forward every week to fellowship with our group for these very reasons...Gammi, Venus, Franklin Pastor Bruce, and Sheryl

Maybe it's time we as a church family embraces small groups for our church. Because I believe 1000% that we need to get back to a place where deeper, more meaningful relationships are built and take those relationships and pour them back into our weekend services where the weekend services unite all the small groups together so we can collectively worship the Lord as a true bonded family. **That to me is the answer.**

We need to put the word **community** back into **Gloucester County Community Church!**

### **Model building:**

It's funny that when I was going through my notes and re read the definition of church as "to assemble." It made me think back to when I was a kid and my fascination with models and go home and assemble them together. And the parts would be bonded with a really strong glue. All those parts had a purpose. And when I assembled them it became something that was whole. Something that could be displayed. And I started to think... what would be harder than trying to assemble dozens of models all thrown together. How many parts would be left out or misplaced. The bonds of the parts may not be as strong as they should because they are being overly stressed trying to fit where they don't belong.

**And that's how it is to have too many competing groups and ministries all thrown together.**

The individual pieces get lost and misplaced and never find their true purpose.

And instead of bonding with all the other parts they are sort of thrown together hoping that **something will stick!**

Now today I don't build models anymore but one of my past times has become watching political news. I watch and read a lot of news and it certainly is a love hate thing with me. Actually when we were doing our church wide fast, I felt the Lord tell me to fast the news believe it or not. But I've noticed on news feeds that there are comment sections usually at the bottom of the articles. And in these sections you will find people bickering back and forth on issues on politics and so on. In fact...They don't even have to be about politics I recently read an article about a man who got bit by a shark. (Explain)

Sometimes the comments are vicious. Its things like stupid conservatives (blaming on global warming guy was probably a dumb liberal.)

**It's like a drive by shooting.** It's easy to say things from a distance and say things and in a way that we wouldn't face to face. People can say anything they want with no consequence.

### **Face to face communication**

We never had open drive by word shootings like we do now. And as Christians we need to be mindful that nothing is better than face to face conversation. We overly use texts and tweets and posts to express how we feel but that is not the way we were meant to solely communicate.

Think of what the word communicate means. Its root word is commune! **To become one with somebody.** That's why the apostle John said in...

**2 John 1:12 ESV -** Though I have much to write to you, I would rather not use paper and ink. Instead I hope to come to you and talk face to face, so that our joy may be complete.

It is my opinion that we **need** real human fellowship. We need it. It's the way God intended it. It's what the word church really means, and if we don't start to embrace one another differently than we are we are going to lose this generation which doesn't need to be!

We need to interact and put things like party affiliation or viewpoints or race or gender aside as a label of who we are.

We need to meet under a banner of peace and love in Jesus name.

**In Christ...We can fellowship despite our differences.**

**Slide 1:** *Galatians 3:26* - So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.

**Slide 2:** 28 - There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, not conservative or liberal, nor black or white or Hispanic or Asian ...for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

In other words...Under Jesus there is no other identity that we need to retreat behind. No wall of separation.

It's where we can talk about our concerns but under the banner of Christ. He again is the model.

### **The disciples**

Think of it...The disciples were very different from one another. That's how Jesus did it. That's how he picked them.

**Mathew for instance was a tax collector.** He belonged to the class of Jewish tax collectors called *moksha* (mahk shuh) and were employed by the publicans to do the actual collecting of taxes within the areas where they lived. They were probably very familiar with the people from whom they collected taxes. And it was expected that they would keep a portion for themselves. These Publicans and tax collectors were despised, regarded as traitors to their own people. Their money was considered unclean and could not even be tithed to the temple. A good Jew would not even associate with publican or tax collector in private life.

Yet we see something very interesting here. We see Jesus (despite that it would upset the Pharisees) enjoyed a meal at Matthew's house (Matthew 9:10-13).

**Contrast with Simon the zealot.**

Simon the Canaanite, earned the title of zealot. His fierce loyalty to his faith and Israel caused him and the other zealots to arouse rebellion among the Jews.

Zealots, like Simon, engaged in politics and anarchy in hopes of instigating a revolution that would overthrow the Roman government.

Now can you have any wider of a contrast than these two? It's like a staunch conservative Nationalist and pro-government liberal eating at the same table.

And yet that who Jesus picked to be His disciples.

That's who He picked to fellowship with.

**Then you add the blue collar workers like...**

- Peter (along with his brother Andrew) who were fisherman.

- Jesus himself was a carpenter.
- And Paul, who would come later, was of an upscale order of respected men.

### **But let's not forget the oddest out of the bunch...**

Jesus even picked an unbeliever to be one of His first 12 disciples.

So we have nothing to fear in our small groups when we meet in Christ's name.

**We are all one and the same.** Small groups is where we can truly be us.

We can get to know each other, share with one another, teach one another, cry for one another, rejoice with one another and maybe most importantly...**eat**

**amazing food with one another!!**

### **Food!**

It's interesting when u think that there's a lot of things in life that we want to do, and there's a lot of things in life that we have to do. Eating is one of the very few that is both.

**Sharing tables is one of the most uniquely human things we do. No other creature consumes its food at a table.**

And it is a custom that is performed all throughout the Bible

### **Some Biblical references**

We recently learned that Abraham made a meal for the three travelers in Gen 18 (one of which was the Lord) and He quickly has Sarah prepare a meal cakes and a choice calf curds and milk.

In Gen 26:28-30, his son Isaac takes up the same hospitality when he makes a well water-covenant with the Philistine king Abimelech.

In Gen 31:44-54 between Laban and Jacob. After making a covenant together, Jacob "called his kinsmen to the meal,"

The Passover Feast. This greatest of all the OT Jewish meals or feasts found in Exodus 12 and was a celebration of the great deliverance of the Jews out of Egypt and their newfound relationship with God.

The family was gathered together and the sacrificial lamb eaten as a fellowship meal and was celebratory, joyful, interactive, and done in the presence of God.

Jesus himself:

Feeding of the 5,000 with 5 loaves of bread and 2 fish( recorded in all four gospels.)

**Jesus didn't just do this type of fellowship meal once but did it twice...**

Feeding of the 4,000, with 7 loaves of bread and fish (found in both Mark and Matthew)

Jesus' had meals with unsavory people. He had a meal with Levi the tax collector. And even meals those that despised Him like at the houses of some Pharisees. And of course we have the last supper as recorded in all 4 gospels.

Traditionally in America, the evening dinner hour was a time for the whole family to gather around the table together and share a meal (sadly even this is going by the wayside). But it is more than a meal. It's not simply about the food. It is about sharing our lives together each day. The meal provides an opportunity for fellowship.

New Testament scholar Nicolas Thomas Wright wrote, "When Jesus himself wanted to explain to his disciples what his forthcoming death was all about, he didn't give them a theory, he gave them a meal."

In Matthew's account of the Last Supper, we read:

"While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, 'Take and eat; this is my body'" (Matt 26:26).

The same pattern of language—blessing, breaking, and giving is a model of our fellowships as well.

### **He gave thanks:**

The fellowship of believers is incredibly important because together we communally thank the Lord for the incredible blessings that we have from the food we eat to the salvation that came from the bread of life.

### **He broke it:**

**Jesus took the bread which represented his body and broke it in order to share it with everyone fellowshiping at that table.**

The same pattern should be applied to our fellowships as well. You see our relationships with Christ is not just something that is kept to ourselves. It is broken and shared so all can partake and be nourished. We don't just keep the lump of bread to ourselves. It was meant to be shared. All the things that we go through in our lives and victories we had and even the salvation that was given to

us, all those things needs to be broken up as we were broken up and shared so they too can receive and be filled.

### **He gave it to His disciples:**

This is the act of serving. Jesus himself gave it to the disciples. Serving is something that is essential to Christian growth all around.

I have spoken at many churches and church groups over the years as well as visiting churches where my wife Desiree performed all over from Boston to Cape May.

We often met people who left a church or were leaving a church because they would say...“We left because we weren’t growing anymore.”

### **Example of me in 5<sup>th</sup> grade lunch:**

I found that this is an area within our small groups that was pretty amazing. In our small group we would take turns on whose house would be the host. And that host home would prepare a meal and serve it.

**But it’s not just the serving of the food...**It’s the contribution to the study's and the praying with others and listening to their burdens as well.

That’s why small groups are so effective. We can pray personally for each other. We can’t do this broadly. It must be intimate.

How can I broadly pray with earnest for the whole church of hundreds or my ministry group of dozens people? It’s hard if not even impossible.

The fellowship of Christ is real. It’s effective. I can pray for you because it’s you and you alone. I can share my struggles with you and discuss my areas of weakness and know that you have my back. And the serving may even find its way beyond the small group gathering. Maybe you'll be able to be there for your Christian brother or sister by offering help with some area that you could be of service. (Maybe pick them up from an airport, or help take boxes out of their attic, watch their dog, or visit them in the hospital etc.)

**We must remember that Christian fellowship means to have Christ at the table. To maintain Christian fellowship we must bring that table with us.**

### **Why is food always a part of social gatherings?**

Some people believe it’s because food can be associated with the time or even bring you back to times of your life. That’s why many people have one or more favorite “comfort foods” that they eat when they feel they need something to lift

their spirits.

But I believe that there is an actual biological reason that food is a part of social gatherings. And it takes us all the way back to when we were infants.

### **Social food bonding:**

Bonding by a definition special connection between individuals. It might be observed between mothers and their babies, lovers, family, friends, or even between owners and their pets.

In the case of the mother-infant bond, it has been known for many years that the hormones, oxytocin, dopamine, play key roles in the bonding between mother and infant.

Scientists call this 'limbic regulation'. It's a remarkable natural phenomenon whereby the mother is neurologically and chemically in sync with her baby, and her baby to her. Breastfeeding mothers and their babies are attuned to each other on a deep biological level. In fact, a breastfeeding mother and her baby are sometimes referred to as a 'dyad' – two individuals so closely linked they are considered one unit.

Her body nourishes him; his feeding determines her milk production.

Oxytocin is considered to be the love hormone. It has anti-anxiety affects, reduces stress hormones (mainly cortisol), promotes feelings of well-being, increases trusting behavior, reduces blood pressure etc. Feel-Good Brain Chemicals (including serotonin, dopamine, norepinephrine, oxytocin):

Well foods also increase the Feel good chemicals of the brain including serotonin, dopamine, norepinephrine, and oxytocin

### **Foods that release these hormones:**

- Protein rich foods: eggs, chicken, beans
- Apples, bananas, beets, watermelon
- Wheat germ

### **Conclusion:**

God set it up from birth that we require a human connection. And He designed it to be accomplished through deep personal fellowship and that fellowship is bonded even further chemically around things like food.

And as we are going to partake in our own communion in just a few moments we want to remember that this is just a model of what we are to do. We need to come together in remembrance of the one who truly gave all for us...

## The Lord Jesus Christ.

Is it any wonder that God paints a beautiful picture for us as believers in Jesus Christ that the day will come in heaven when the angel will say...

***Revelation 19* - Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb."**

**This fellowship will not end for those who have Jesus!**