



# Living Fellowship





“As I read the books of Helen Roseveare, these powerful words come to my mind – REALITY, VISION, INTEGRITY, COURAGE, ACTION and FORGIVENESS. They are all words that we need to hold centrally in our lives too. Perhaps you don’t read many books but I would urge you to read this one - and then to share what you’ve learned with others. They are a huge challenge to the indifference and lukewarm-ness of our day. It is necessary for the church to have IMPACT for the good of this world. Helen shows what kind of impact you too can have.”

**George Verwer**





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*Willing to be the third  
side of a triangle*

*Helen Roseveare*

CHRISTIAN  
**FOCUS**



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## PREFACE

It is many years since I began to pray and prepare my mind towards the writing of this book, the fourth in the series on 'The Four Pillars of WEC'. As a full-time serving missionary with WEC International, this project was suggested to me by the Mission leadership in 1976 and, over the intervening years, God has enabled the production of the first three books on Sacrifice, Faith and Holiness. Only the fourth pillar, Fellowship, remained.

In 1986, as the manuscript began to take shape in my thoughts, I attended a missionary convention in Hamilton, Ontario, organised by Canadian Christian students as a means to challenge their peers to a lifetime commitment in the service of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Keith Price, a most godly and gracious Christian gentleman, gave four Bible studies at that convention. Not only did those studies speak deeply to my own heart, but they also confirmed, in wonderful detail, my own ponderings as to the true biblical meaning of the word 'fellowship'.

What follows is a filling-out of those studies as the Holy Spirit has underlined for me the double





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essentials of relationship and practice if we are to live in meaningful *koinonia* fellowship with God and His people in today's suffering world.

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## PROLOGUE

### THE PEACE OF THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE TRINITY

A hurricane spiralled its way across the valley to the east and up between the two hills which flanked the Nyankunde Medical Centre. To the south side of our thatched bungalow, the roof of Dr Ulrich's home was lifted and flung a hundred yards into the next valley. The torrential storm that followed burst on the doctor's unprotected family, huddled together in shock and fear in the roofless, ceilingless dining room. Soaked through in a matter of seconds, they watched helplessly as lightning flashed across the skies, the destruction of all their household possessions.

To the north, on the other side of our home, first the Swiss nurses' home, and then the pilot's home, were similarly battered.

Centrally between the doctor's and the pilot's homes, a couple of hundred yards from each, our house stood undamaged. My friend and I were woken by the noise of the ferocious storm raging outside on all sides, initially unaware of what was occurring to







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others – at peace in the security of our undamaged home.

Peace – physical stillness – when all around was terrifying turmoil.




On Christmas Eve 1964, three British women missionaries with nine Belgian children made their way from the convent where they were being held prisoners, across the compound to the monastery where a carol service was to take place. Priests and male missionaries, also prisoners of the guerrilla regime, had made a rough manger scene and persuaded the soldier-guards to allow the children to join them for a carol service. In the countryside all around the Catholic Mission compound, a vicious war was being waged between the Congolese National Army and the Simba guerrillas. During the five preceding and the two following months, over two hundred European and American missionaries (Catholic and Protestant) were brutally murdered and thousands of nationals tortured, mutilated and savagely butchered to death. In the midst of all this raging devastation, this small group of Christians worshipped God, singing carols around a simple manger scene.

Physical stillness, spiritual peace.

The word ‘fellowship’ is used today by an amazing variety of groups who often have very little in common between their members or their activities, frequently with little or no apparent peace. The word is used by political and socio-economic groups, as well as by Christians, to indicate sometimes nothing more than a gathering together for tea and biscuits! In fact, the Christian Church has allowed itself to be drawn into the same loose







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usage of the word, with little regard to the true biblical meaning of the New Testament word, *koinonia*. Groups of people, with extraordinarily different opinions and convictions, have been drawn together by some means or other and are then said to be ‘in fellowship’ with each other, despite lack of harmony in their practices and even intolerance towards each other’s beliefs.

In our many English translations of the Scriptures, the Greek word *koinonia* is variously translated as ‘fellowship of sharing’, ‘participating’, ‘being partakers one of another’, ‘partnership’, ‘taking part in’ something together, and also, from the same root, as ‘having all things together in common’ – expressed also in words such as ‘community’ and ‘communion’.



In his book *God’s New Society* (IVP, 1979), John Stott shows that it is only as we as individuals are saved by grace through faith that we become members of God’s new society, the Church, the family of God’s adopted children, and can therefore enjoy true fellowship one with another. Both Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones, in *The Cross* (Banner of Truth, 1976), and John Stott, in *The Cross of Christ* (IVP, 1976), have explained that this ‘fellowship of believers’ can only exist as each member is convinced of the centrality of the Cross in their own personal Christian lives. Biblical *koinonia* has no meaning if all the members do not have this one thing ‘in common’, that each one has individually put their trust in the death of Christ on the Cross for their redemption.

The Cross has to be the common attraction that draws members into the closely knit fellowship of the local church. However, this *koinonia* is not an exclusive club; it is not divisive and it is certainly not man-orientated.



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It is inclusive of all who believe; it is unitive for all who place their trust in Christ as Lord and Saviour; it is self-abnegating, as each member seeks to give for the good of others in the fellowship rather than to get from the group for one's own benefit. It is a fellowship based on love and loyalty, understanding and trust; a desire to see the other person's point of view rather than to gain one's own way; a willingness to be ignored, overlooked or misunderstood if this should be for the general good.

In his book *True Fellowship* (NavPress, 1986), Jerry Bridges reminds us that *koinonia* is not about sitting around drinking coffee together and talking about everything and anything in our daily lives. He says: 'True fellowship is not Christian social interaction... it is not an activity; it is a relationship.' He goes on to show very clearly that as we relate firstly to God Himself by the new birth and adoption into His family, so secondly can we relate to all other members of His family, that is, the Church. As we so relate, we shall want to share both our spiritual life and our material possessions. It is this two-way relationship and two-way sharing together that constitute, at least in part, *koinonia* in its truest biblical sense.

The doctrinal meaning of *koinonia*, as it is promised to all members of the visible Church of the Lord Jesus Christ here on earth, can only be rightly understood as we recognise the fellowship that exists between the three Persons of the Trinity.

These three Persons act together, most noticeably in creation and in the redemption of mankind, in perfect harmony. We can hear God saying in Genesis 1:24: 'Let



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us make man in our image', and then read of each Person of the Trinity playing His part in that creative act:

*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth... and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.*

*(Gen. 1:1-2)*

*God... has spoken to us by his Son... through whom he made the universe.*

*(Heb. 1:1-2)*

*In the beginning was the Word... and the Word was God... Through him all things were made.*

*(John 1:1-3)*

They work in the same harmony in procuring the redemption of man.

God the Father preordained that His Son should be put to death 'by nailing him to the cross' (Acts 2:23) and so He chose us in Christ 'before the creation of the world' (Eph. 1:4).

God the Son 'loved [us] ... and gave himself for [us]' (Gal. 2:20). Did He not say, of the Good Shepherd, 'I lay down my life... No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord' (John 10:17-18)?

God the Spirit makes this redemption real in the heart of each believer. Not only are we to be 'born of the Spirit' (John 3:8) and so become 'new creation[s]' in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17), but we are to know that we are saved; we are to understand what God has wrought for us. 'God has revealed [all this] ... to us by his Spirit' (1 Cor. 2:10).

This harmonious working of the Trinity brings peace



into the heart of each believer. '[T]he Counsellor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name,' Christ said to His disciples, 'will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. Peace I leave with you,' Christ continued, as though the very presence of the Holy Spirit would in itself bestow that very peace. 'My peace I give you' (John 14:26-7).

'Christ Jesus... is our peace,' Paul wrote to the Ephesians, as he explained how, by His death on the Cross, Christ had broken down the dividing wall of hostility that existed between us and God, and between us and others: 'His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace' (Eph. 2:13-15).

Furthermore, the three Persons of the Trinity not only work together in perfect fellowship, but also they claim equality, the One with each Other. The Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, claimed equality and unity with His Father, and the Father and the Son state they are equal to the Spirit: 'I and the Father are one,' Jesus explicitly stated (John 10:30).

"My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working." For this reason the Jews tried all the harder to kill him; not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God' (John 5:17-18).

Jesus then claimed that the Spirit proceeded from them. 'When the Counsellor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, he will testify about me' (John 15:26).

Jesus prayed that Christians would know this same unity among themselves as He and His Father and the



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Spirit enjoyed among themselves (John 17:21-3): ‘... that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity...’

Such unity will indeed be the basis of true fellowship, and this in turn will bring about true peace.

So, firstly we are to have fellowship with God, our fellowship being with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ (1 John 1:3), and also with the Spirit (Phil. 2:1). In the following chapters, we shall seek to understand clearly that this fellowship flows out of a definite and personal relationship which manifests itself in certain practices.

However, that is only the first step to understanding the full meaning of biblical *koinonia*, for not only are we to enter into true fellowship with God, but this is also then to work out into fellowship with other members of the Body. John declares that we are to ‘have fellowship with one another’ (1 John 1:7-10). Here again, this fellowship has to flow out of a clearly understood relationship which will manifest itself in practical ways to the common good. Luke described this so clearly between believers in the early Church:

*Those who accepted [Peter’s] message were baptised, and about three thousand were added to [the Church’s] number that day. They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs*





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*were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people.*

*(Acts 2:41-7)*

Then thirdly, there is a yet deeper aspect to *koinonia*. Paul invites us to take part in ‘the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings’ (Phil. 3:10). If we are willing to be led by the Spirit into an understanding of this deep mystery, the threefold cord of *koinonia* will be complete.

So, as we move forward into the development of biblical fellowship, we will need to look in more detail, firstly at the upward stretch of fellowship between the individual and God Himself; secondly, we shall seek to understand the outstretched hand of fellowship between an individual Christian and his fellow-man; and lastly, we shall dare to enter into the mystery that is fellowship in the suffering of God for the world in which we live.

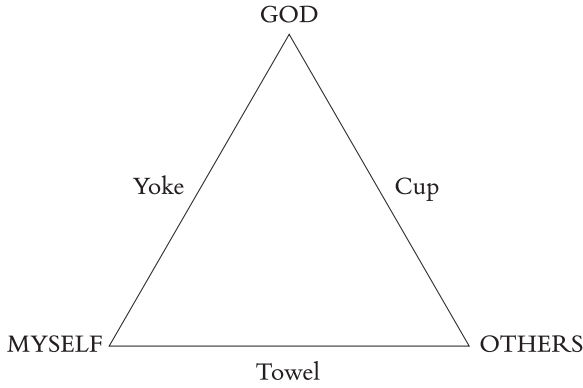
Each of these three areas of fellowship depends initially on a vital relationship between the parties involved, which will then manifest itself in certain practical activities. As we look at each of the three relationships, I shall use the allegory of a wheel: the relationship of the hub to the spokes, the relationship of the spokes to the surrounding rim, and the relationship of the hub to the rim, albeit via the spokes.

Then, as we turn from thinking of these relationships to realise how they can be worked out in the practicalities of our daily lives, I have used three specific symbols



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from the life of our Lord Jesus Christ – the yoke, the towel, and the cup – to help us come to grips with all that is involved in vital *koinonia*. These three symbols have been thought of as forming the three sides of a triangle.



True fellowship is actually right relationships worked out in our lives in practical ways. Such relationships bring peace. This is the peace that He made available to us when He died on the Cross as our substitute; it is ‘the peace of God that transcends all understanding’ (Phil. 4:7).

Peace is the obvious and invariable fruit of biblical *koinonia* – fellowship with God, fellowship with our fellow-men, and fellowship in suffering ‘for his name’ – peace with God, peace with ourselves, and peace with each other.

