

Companionship

Philippians 2:1-4

Starting with God

Therefore, if you have any encouragement from *being united with Christ*, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion,

Frank Laubach. 'As an ordained minister, he confessed to being ashamed that he often overlooked the joy of sharing God's presence. His writings encourage us to get to know "the invisible companion inside you." "God" he wrote, "is infinitely more important than His advice or His gifts; indeed, He, Himself, is the great gift."' (Mike Breen 2016:99)

Companionship as disciples begins with God in our lives, his presence, this is the foundation of Christian companionship.

The overflow of the heart

Then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind.

Disciples share a common faith and practice, summarised here in Philippians but found in many places across the New Testament. Unity without copying (allowing for the uniqueness of each other), unity that allows for (and celebrates) diversity.

Living in two directions

As disciples we allow our character to live and grow in two directions.

Firstly, outwardly - **Do nothing *out* of selfish ambition or vain conceit**, this describes the way I project myself, the external aspect of myself that meets you my fellow disciple. This describes the direction of my behaviour, the way I act.

Secondly, inwardly - ***in* humility value others above yourselves**, this the inner direction of the heart. It describes the development of a Christlike attitude that follows in verses 5-11. It is the outcome of being united with Christ and is the pinnacle of personhood. It marks the way I think about others.

Connect Group Questions

1. If a disciple's companionship with others always begins with their companionship with God, how would you encourage another to practice being in God's presence?

2. When I was a teenager, graffitied onto my friend's bedroom wall was 'I hate peas they're all clones'. What do you see as the difference between the positive call of Christian companionship to be 'like-minded' and a more stifling act of being a 'copycat'? Is there a difference?
3. When we thought about the role of the Spirit in the life of the disciple, we described the inner and outer work of the Spirit as contemplative and charismatic. In a similar way we have a pair of inner and outer actions to describe the way disciples think and act toward each other, '**in** humility' and '**do** nothing out of selfish ambition'. How might we develop these inner and outer practices as companions in the way we think about each other and act toward each other?