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ALABASTER MINISTRIES

UPDATE

Dear Friends and Partners, (from Pastor Francis)

When you associate with Christians long enough, you will hear the word fellowship every now and again. In Acts 2:42 we read that one of the most important things the early church devoted itself to was "fellowship." Fellowship was an especially important part of their reason for meeting together and one of their main objectives. We hear it said that what we need is more fellowship but our modern ideas of fellowship have become so watered down that the word no longer carries the same meaning it did in New Testament times.

It is profound that Luke tells us in the book of Acts that the early Christians also devoted themselves to fellowship. *They just did not have fellowship; they devoted themselves to it.* This means that fellowship was a priority and one of the objectives for gathering. Perhaps today we think of fellowship as sharing a cup of coffee or sitting down for a meal with others. This is not bad at all as it also contributes to fellowship but it is a far cry from the biblical standards according to the meaning of the Greek word '*koinonia*'.

The challenges presented to us by the Covid have presented us with a new challenge. It is probable that a lot more people now seek "fellowship" through viewing a worship service online and will discontinue going to a physical church.

The electronic base creates an emptiness and prevents us from sharpening each other. We quickly run out of spiritual gasoline and favor every time we disassociate ourselves from the church.

True fellowship involves getting together for spiritual purposes; sharing needs, for prayer, discussing and sharing the Word to encourage, comfort, and edify one another. This certainly is an aspect of Christian fellowship, and one that is much more important. It is an area of fellowship that is often lacking in the church today and one that needs to be remedied. But even this does not comprehend or grasp the full and rich meaning of "fellowship" in the New Testament. Is it really fellowship whenever a Christian share something with another person? Is it fellowship every time people get together in social settings or are united by one task? What really counts for fellowship?

According to Webster's Dictionary, fellowship means: (a) companionship, company, associate (b) the community of interest, activity, feeling or experience, i.e., a unified body of people of equal rank sharing in common interests, goals, and characteristics, etc.; (c) partnership, membership (an obsolete usage but an important one. It shows what has happened to our ideas of fellowship). HOWEVER, the Greek word "KOINONIA" expresses fellowship as the idea of being together for mutual benefit. Cont. page 2

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"He shall be a vessel unto honor, sanctified and meant for the master's use and prepared for every good work."

PASTOR FRANCIS: Continued

Hebrews 10:24-25 echoes this; *“Let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the day drawing near.”* The simplest reason why fellowship is so important is because it helps express love to one another and it encourages good



works. It also has a significant impact on other believers. John 13:35,

“Jesus said, by this all people will know that you are my disciples, you have love one for another.” In other words, so many other people are impacted by the way we express ourselves in whatever manner.

Fellowship is all about relationship. Fellowship is first the sharing together in a common life with other believers through relationship with God through Jesus Christ. Fellowship is first and foremost a *relationship*, rather than an *activity*. The principle is that any activity that follows, should come out of the relationship. In Acts 2:42 the early church was not merely devoting itself to activities, but to a relationship. It was this relationship that produced an active sharing in other ways. It is so important that we grasp this. Fellowship means we belong to each other in a relationship because we share together the common life and enabling grace of Jesus Christ. On the other hand, both Greek words *koinonia* and *metocos* mean to share together in the sense of a *partnership*. As sharers together of the Person and life of Christ, we are automatically copartners in His enterprise here on earth. First relationship describes what we are; a community of people bound together by our common life and blessings that we share together through our relationship with Christ. Partnership describes how we are related to each other in that relationship: we are partners in an enterprise and calling in which we are to work together in a common purpose to obtain common objectives for the glory of God and the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Furthermore, we also know that we cannot leave out companionship in our fellowship. The communication that exists between or among individuals associated together through relationships and partnerships makes for great companionships. The secret ingredient here is communication, which is the sharing of ideas, feelings, information, concepts, and needs to mention a few things. Companionship may as well include our communion and fellowship with the Lord through the word, and prayer, and our communion and fellowship with the body of Christ, which may include assembling in smaller groups, one-on-one meetings, church gatherings, breaking bread and so on. Paul and John never used the term fellowship in a purely secular sense. It always had a spiritual base and a spiritual means. The idea of an earthly fellowship founded upon common interests or common likes or dislikes or similar personalities or human opinions or purely physical ties was a foreign idea in connection with Christian fellowship. 1 John 1:1-3 *“What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we beheld and our hands handled, concerning the Word of Life—and the life was manifested, and we have seen and bear witness and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us—what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, that you also may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ.”* The coming of the Son and the proclamation of His Word was not an end in itself. Its purpose was *fellowship*. Fellowship in all its aspects comes from the proclamation of the Word of Christ. True fellowship must have its foundation in the Word and it must get its energy, direction, and scope from the Scriptures. This is central, but unfortunately in our day of the “feel good” kind of Christianity other things have become central and the Bible has been given a back seat.

I believe it is extremely important that Luke shows us in Acts 2 how those who lived in antiquity devoted themselves to another through perfect communication as branches of the true vine should. We should seek to comfort and encourage one another (Heb. 3:18), admonish one another (Rom. 15:14), to worship together (Heb.10:25), to bear each other’s burdens (Gal. 6:2), to always seek good for one another (1Thesalonians 5:15). May we continue to walk in obedience to the commandments of heaven and better our fellowship with our brethren.

ABOUT US

We, Alabaster Ministries

are based in the United States with a tax-deductible status under 501(c)(3).

We also have representation in the United Kingdom and are covered by Stewardship Services

Our representatives there are Michael and Penny Shellswell.

Phone: +44-7780-383452 (Michael)

+44-7551974316 (Penny)

In Malawi we have Oresti and Julie Yiannakis who are a wonderful support and without whom it would be extremely difficult for us to operate.

Our staff comprise of local Malawians, and volunteer staff in the USA and UK.

It is our belief that we should train the locals to one day be able to totally run every aspect of the ministry in their nation and to train the next generation to one day take over while we support and give advice where needed.

God has blessed us with an amazing team of people who are always ready and willing no matter what comes against us. God is in charge and is faithful when we are about His business.

This is an exciting ministry to be a part of and we so appreciate your support.

CONTACT US

You can support this exciting and vibrant ministry by sending checks to:

Alabaster Ministries

9641 N Ambassador Dr #1709

Kansas City, MO 64154

OR _____

Via the web site direct to PayPal.

OR

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Telephone (636)358-4615



Email alabastermin@aol.com

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Website: www.rozheyms.org

VIHZINA BENASI:



I have just returned from visiting Pastor Shadreck and stopped by Vihzina Benasi's house on my way back to Tengani. I have come to know Mbuya Vihzina personally over the years and when you are around this wonderful person you cannot help but laugh at her great sense of humor. She walks a mile to have fellowship with Pastor Shadreck every day. If she does not grace Shadreck with her presence, he knows something is not right and goes to check up on her. Vihzina could not stop telling me how happy she was to personally meet pastor Roz in her village. She brought pastor Roz 8 eggs one morning which is an enormous gift because those could have been 8 big chickens someday but she made that sacrifice for a guest and a friend in her home village. Her sacrifice reminded me of the poor widow who gave the mites and Jesus said she gave more than everyone because that was all she had to give. May the Lord continue to bless her. She says that people in America have no idea how much the distribution means for them all especially when there is drought and a shortage of food. It means survival for them and their families and sometimes God stretches it like the widow at the time of Elijah.

Vihzina Benasi lives a simple life in the village and says the little that God provides her suffices but her only request is a house. Her house fell over a while ago. I was particularly concerned about her wellbeing especially now that we are in our second month of winter in Malawi. It is extremely cold and sometimes we have cold rains in the mountains between the months of May and July which are not safe conditions for anyone at her age. She said her daughter has taken her in and she is having to share a room with her grandchildren but would so much love to live in her own house again someday. We would implore you, to extend a helping hand and make a difference in our beloved Vihzina's life. God Bless you. A two-room house is now \$600.

YOUTH CONFERENCE:

We recently held a youth conference and we were blest to have over 100 youth for the weekend. It was a great time of "fellowship," These conferences are a time when we bring people in from different villages and they can get to know each other and to get to know what is going outside of their own area. It is a time for them to pray for each other and lift each other up in the Word and encourage one another. They also might find some time for a game of soccer. The purpose of our land in the mountains is not just to have the Bible School situated there but to be able to host these youth groups and ladies' groups so that they all may be equipped and trained in Kingdom works, with Kingdom thinking and ideas. These meetings are held every three months as are the ladies' meetings. The theme for this youth conference was the book of James.

The gospel of James has a sober admonition for those who would become teachers in the church and I also believe everyone who takes up other prominent roles in the world we live in today. They must take the responsibility seriously, because their accountability is greater and so, much is expected of them. It becomes easy for the movers and shakers of this world to become masters of spin and feed millions their oily rhetoric without considering the circumstances that may lead to; and likewise, it is easy to take the position of teacher lightly in the church, without considering the costs in terms of accountability. Jesus warned to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much have been committed, of him they will ask the more. (Luke 12:48). The words of Jesus and James remind us that being a leader and any person with the ability to influence others is more than a matter of having natural or even spiritual gifts; there is an additional dimension of appropriate character and right living.

Therefore, teachers and leaders were both tested more and would be judged more strictly. Their case is awful; they shall receive greater condemnation than common sinners; they have not only sinned in thrusting themselves into that office to which God has never called them, but through their insufficiency the flocks over whom they have assumed the mastery perish for lack of knowledge, and their blood will required of them at the Watchman's hand. The greater accountability of teachers is especially sobering considering our common weaknesses. After all, we all stumble in many things. The ancient Greek word translated stumble does not imply a fatal fall, but something that trips us up and hinders our spiritual progress. We all stumble. James the apostle included himself among those who stumble, BUT he did not excuse his or our stumbling. We know that we all stumble, but we should all press on to a better walk with the Lord, marked by less stumbling.

If anyone does not stumble in word, he is a perfect man. James provided a way to measure spiritual maturity for teachers and for all Christians. Jesus demonstrated in Matthew 12:34-37 that words are the revelation of the inner character. To not stumble in word shows true spiritual maturity. This is especially relevant to teachers, who have so much more opportunity to sin with their tongue. We stumble in word about ourselves, with our boasting, exaggeration, and selective reporting. We stumble in word about others, with our criticism, gossip, slander, cruelty, two-facedness, and anger; or with flattery and insincere words meant to gain favor.

We have all heard of the expressions, "THE PEN IS MIGHTIER THAN THE SWORD." Those of us fortunate enough to have studied history and lived through periods of charismatic men like Winston Churchill know how much their speeches changed the fate of the world. The horseman puts bits in a horse's mouth so that it should obey him and with such small bits he is able to turn the whole body in whatever direction he chooses. Even so the tongue is an exceedingly small member. and boasts great things. See how great a forest a little fire kindles! And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole

body, and sets on fire the course of nature, The fire of the tongue has been used to burn many. Children are told sticks and stones may break my bones, but words can never hurt me. But that child's rhyme is not true; the bitter pain of a word spoken against us can hurt us for a lifetime, long after a broken bone has healed. What others say to us and what we say to others can last a long time, for good or for evil. The casual sarcastic or critical remark can inflict a lasting injury on another person. The well-timed encouragement or compliment can inspire someone for the rest of their life. The book of Proverbs speaks of the person who does not consider the destructive power of his words. Like a madman who throws firebrands, arrows, and death, is the man who deceives his neighbor, and says, "I was only joking!" (Proverbs 26:18-19).

Because we trust God to provide what we need, we can let go of envy and selfish ambition. We can lead lives of peace, gentleness, reasonableness, kindness, and more. We can help plant peace and help bring in the harvest of righteousness.



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PASTOR PETER NOTICE:

Pastor Notice Peter graduated from the Chididi Alabaster Bible school in 2018. He has become a real soldier for Christ and a beacon of hope in his Village. We recently had a three-day prayer meeting his church and had such a great time showing the Jesus movie and witnessing to our brethren there. It is always wonderful to witness in the remote areas of Malawi where very few people hear the Word let alone get the opportunity to watch television so to have us show the Jesus movie in their indigenous Sena language was a great way for them to actually visualize the Living reality of Jesus Christ and the road to our redemption.

Pastor Notice asked me to convey his heartfelt gratitude to you our dearly beloved partners and friends, and Pastor Roz who made it possible for him to undergo Bible School training for three years in Chididi. He would like to thank all who make this ministry a success because your support made it possible for Pastor Roz and the staff to impart in them knowledge that he would have never acquired elsewhere in his humble village. Alabaster has set him apart and he has become an influential figure in his house, village, and the rest of the surrounding community. He wishes that one-day Pastor Roz and you our dearly beloved may be able to visit him in his village so that he can show you just how much he appreciates you all.

Picture at the head of Page 1

**PLEASE NOTE THAT OUR
ADDRESS HAS CHANGED:**

**ALABASTER MINISTRIES
9641 N AMBASSADOR DR
1709
KANSAS CITY, MO 64154**

