



For the best spiritual benefit, please prayerfully discuss this Nugget with those with you on your faith pilgrimage.

Dear Friends in Christ Jesus our Lord,

The most common practices of what's widely considered *fellowship* in Christianity have generally involved: •praying together; •studying the Bible together; •taking communion together; •worshipping together; •eating together. But true fellowship as experienced by our Lord Jesus's first followers was also undergirded by an unwavering commitment to **relational deference**.

Relational deference is first and foremost your deep heartfelt devotion to both our Father and our Lord Jesus when you're born from above by the Holy Spirit. But relational deference also extends to the brothers and sisters in your fellowship family, especially as the *keystone* to mutually upholding **communal righteousness**. (A keystone is a central stone at the summit of an arch, locking the whole thing together.) It was communal righteousness enacted by our Lord's earliest followers through His indwelling Spirit which enabled them to experience spiritual power and relational intimacy.



Please pause to read Chapter 9 of our online book, Pastoring By Elders, [Following Jesus As Lord Requires Your Deference](#), where we discuss the biblical backdrop to *deference* toward our Father and Lord Jesus, and toward those in authority. Because authority comes from above ("for there is no authority except from God"), your heavenly Father requires that you submit to a governing authority's position with an attitude of deference (see Romans 13:1-5).

- Deference* is shown when you avoid choices and decisions that would offend those in authority over you.
- Deference* causes you to fulfill your responsibilities with a willing heart rather than as a burden of obligation.
- Deference* is linked with humility, giving honor and esteeming those who have a right to it.

Our Lord manifested deference by His obedient actions in doing His Father's will.

Deference lay at the heart of Jesus's unquestioning obedience in fulfilling all of His Father's will: "*For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will but the will of Him Who sent Me*" (John 6:38; see also 5:30, 12:49; 14:10). If you are *genuine*, then deference is your heart motivator to earnestly do all that Father has purposed for you (Romans 8:28; Ephesians 2:10). Your loving pursuit to walk in the footsteps of our Lord Jesus is impossible if you don't have heart deference as He did. And you can't fulfill our Father's gracious purposes for you without following through in the obedient action which loving deference produces.

Deference is also humility that's demonstrated in your treatment of others.

Deference to authority was deeply engrained in Mike's character as a young man and was further reinforced during his decade of military service. If you've read the above link to Pastoring By Elders, you know how deeply committed he has been to helping others develop deference to authority. But there's more. In Kingdom Living Today Addenda Saga 7, [The Lordship-Committed Serve A King Who Empowers His Own](#) we offer another insight about deference:

While living at the retreat center, when we didn't have retreats that lasted through Sunday we attended a particular faith community. Also attending there were the leaders of three campus ministries at UCONN, which was located about four miles from the retreat center. One day "Nate", the leader of one of the ministries, came out to the center to speak with Mike. "I've heard you say at times, *'The Lord told me.'* I've never heard the Lord speak to me until last night. He told me I wasn't to put a card in the students' mail boxes." (Putting invitation cards in students' boxes asking if they'd like to be part of a Bible study was standard practice in his ministry.) After some discussion with Mike, Nate was sure the Lord really had spoken to him, and didn't put any cards in the boxes. And that semester he had far more students in his Bible study than ever before!

Halfway through the semester Nate came to see Mike again. This time he told Mike that the Lord had told him to leave the campus ministry at the end of the semester. He and his wife prayed and confirmed that this was God's will. Then Nate blessed Mike with a word of wisdom: "You often tell people to make sure they show deference to authorities or they'll have trouble with God (Romans 13:1,2). You insist that deference is an absolutely essential character quality for belonging to Jesus as their Lord." Mike acknowledged that deference to authority is crucial. Nate went on, "I'd like to tell you that you also practice what I consider a higher form of deference, ***relational deference***. You put the needs of others first and keep your word no matter what the cost." Tears of joy filled Mike's eyes as he and Nate hugged in mutual appreciation. We realized that many of the 54 one-anothers in the Newer Testament rely on relational deference which emanates from the heart toward each other in Christ.

FYI: Over the years since Mike first learned about having relational deference, we've reflected on this key character quality in our own spiritual walk. We realized that the nature of our trusting obedience to our Father and our Lord Jesus really had changed. Our deference had transformed from a respectful obedient response to Their authority, and had matured into heart-motivated relational deference. The indwelling Holy Spirit had produced this change in us over the years as we applied our Lord's commands to our lives as His Spirit directed and empowered us. We wanted to tell you about our experience regarding relational deference before we went on to discuss communal righteousness in your fellowship family. That's because relational deference should be the heartfelt keystone of your mutual commitment to communal righteousness out of loving regard for our Lord and for one another. Think about the depth of commitment which our Lord Jesus and the apostle Paul describe about relational deference:

"Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13).

"Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus. Who, though He was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross" (Philippians 2:3-8).

Relational deference is not you looking for what you can get out of your fellowship relationships! Rather, and more importantly, it's how you manifest your heartfelt humble regard for your brothers and sisters in your fellowship family.

Our Father's Goal For The Genuine Is To Experience True Fellowship

If you prayerfully examine the Scriptures, you'll discover our Father's goal and objectives for the *genuine* to experience biblically authentic fellowship:

1. Your fellowship with others spur you on to glorify our Father through praise, worship, and a lifestyle that yields testimony of praise to Him as you do His will.
2. Your fellowship with one another result in progressive growth in Christ-like character in each person.
3. Your fellowship family provide the corrective/confrontational means to assist each other to enter the narrow gate.
4. Your fellowship family mutually extends the Kingdom of God on earth by fervently pursuing the lost as Christ's ambassadors.

Please note in #3, above, that a fellowship family comprises a vast array of very unique, redeemed "parts"—brothers and sisters in our Lord Jesus who, through relational deference, are called to be each other's "keepers" out of hearts of love. Our Lord holds those within your fellowship family communally responsible to confront any sin in your midst which hinders your prayers from being answered. That's so the person clinging to his or her sin can repent and return by His grace to the right way of living. God holds you accountable as His child in Christ to confront sin in anyone in your fellowship family so they might repent and be restored. Our Lord makes the process of this heart-driven confrontation very clear:

"If your brother sins, go and tell him his fault privately between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others with you, that 'by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word [rhema—specific accusation] may be established.' If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church [the collective called-out ones]. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile [pagan] and a tax collector" (Matthew 18:15-17).

In regard to the nature of communal righteousness, the Hebrew Scriptures recount that •God prevented the entire nation of Israel from conquering the tiny city of Ai because of the hidden sin of one man, Achan (Joshua 7). •King David's sin of counting his troops (2 Samuel 24) brought three days of plague upon all the people. •Jonah's insubordinate retreat from God's purposes wreaked havoc on all the ship's storm-tossed sailors (Jonah 1). God upheld His same standard of righteousness for the fledgling Church by taking the lives of Ananias and Sapphira when they lied (see Acts 5:1-11). The consequences of that deceptive couple's disobedience •thrust holy fear on all who heard of their deaths, a reminder to not mistake God's love for toleration of sin.

The imputed righteousness of Christ on His own as well as their practiced righteousness are God's prerequisite for answered prayer. James refers to Proverbs 15:29 to affirm this truth: "The Lord is far from the wicked but He hears the prayer of the righteous." There's a vital link between confession and righteousness for today's followers of Jesus and their faith families:

"Confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much. Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit" (James 5:16-18).

Without communal righteousness, your mutual prayers go unanswered and our Father receives no glory from how He might have answered. But with repentance comes powerful response! Elijah-sized results are powerful testimonies which encourage followers of Jesus and

catch the attention of unbelievers. The Book of Acts often cites a need for answered prayer. Followers of Jesus gathered in homes rather than at the Temple to pray for those needs. Peter's miraculous release from prison is one of many examples of our Father answering the prayers of righteous people who got together in a home as spiritual family mutually calling on Him in trust.

✚ And since Elijah was only a human like we are, should we expect any less results from our prayers? Is your faith family collectively walking the path of communal righteousness so that you all are available as Elijah was to pray when called upon? Through your answered prayer our Father is glorified! And confession and repentance within your home fellowship family are key to maintaining ongoing prayer that brings divine answers.

Never forget that prayer is spiritual warfare for the *genuine*

Hebrew Scripture reports that God answered Daniel the same day he began to pray. However, a demonic delay hindered the response from immediately reaching the prophet. Satanic forces opposed the ministering angel who was bringing God's answer (see Daniel 10; Hebrews 1:14). Urged on by unrelenting trust, righteous Daniel prayed for twenty-one days until the heavenly messenger, with the help of the archangel Michael, finally broke through with God's answer. Learn from Daniel and don't give up crying out to our Father for that which accords with His will! Centuries later, Jesus voiced the parable of the persistent widow (see Luke 18:1-8) to encourage His followers to pray without ceasing: *"And will not God bring about justice for His chosen ones, who cry out to Him day and night?"* (Luke 18:7).

Satan realizes the power of communal righteousness combined with prayer that perseveres until the answer is received and Father is glorified. If the enemy can't hinder your prayer through unconfessed sin, then he'll discourage you from prayer by instilling doubt and unbelief that your Lord will answer you. This is why communal righteousness along with close-knit commitment and contact with one another is critical: to encourage each person to persist in prayer.

!!!A fellowship family that continues to experience Father-sized answers to their prayers is strengthened and encouraged by each answer. Answered prayer that brings glory to our Father becomes communally addictive! Each testimony of answered prayer is a bullet to pierce the resistant armor of doubt and unbelief of someone with whom you share the Gospel. Through communal holy and loving boldness, your extended spiritual family can fulfill Objective #4, "Your fellowship family mutually extends the Kingdom of God on earth by fervently pursuing the lost as Christ's ambassadors." Answered prayer is like artillery that blazes the way for the Gospel to be received by those who hear your testimonies and marvel at our Father's intervention.

Relational Deference



Communal Righteousness

Finally, relational deference and communal righteousness help you resist sinning and holding onto unconfessed sin. Consider the following example as a sample relational pledge by the communally righteous to walk alongside one another as authentic fellowship family:

"I promise, with the grace of our Lord Jesus, to live repentantly. I can't promise you that I won't sin. But I will be quick to repent and to walk in righteousness by His grace so that our Father will hear and answer each of our prayers. My commitment is that He and our Lord Jesus may be glorified in our mutual relationship as the Holy Spirit works within us to deepen our mutual love and obedient trust."

(For further insight see Chapter 31 of the online version of Restoring The Early Church: [Fellowship Of Homes Supports Communal Righteousness](https://restorationministries.org/)).