



Slide #1

With the two-fold emphasis of loving God and loving neighbors (Matt 22:36-40), Jesus addressed the responsibilities of those who choose to follow Him concerning three different relationships.

[**Note:** Relationships are between an individual and God or between individuals. Relationships establish an initial connection between two parties from which friendships and fellowship can develop or grow. See *Supplement* that clarifies relational connections.]

Three-Dimensional Relationships of the Church

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Slide #2

These relational concerns for the church are multidimensional:

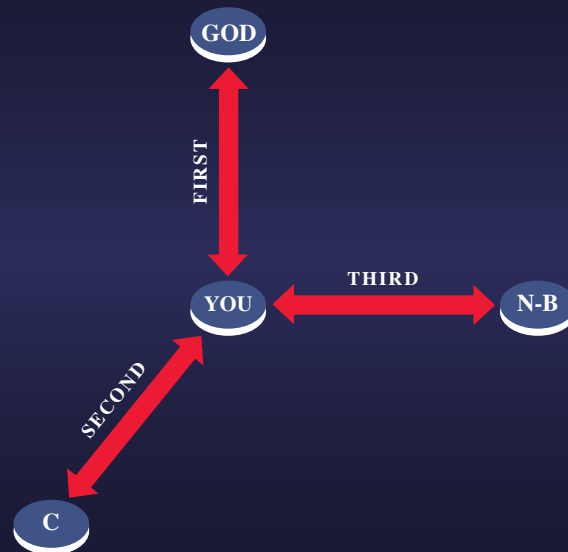
First dimension—between a believer and God

Second dimension—between a believer and a believer

Third dimension—between a believer and a non-believer

My assumption on this slide is that “you” are a believer in Christ and your responsibility is toward God, believers and non-believers.

THREE-DIMENSIONAL RELATIONSHIPS OF THE CHURCH



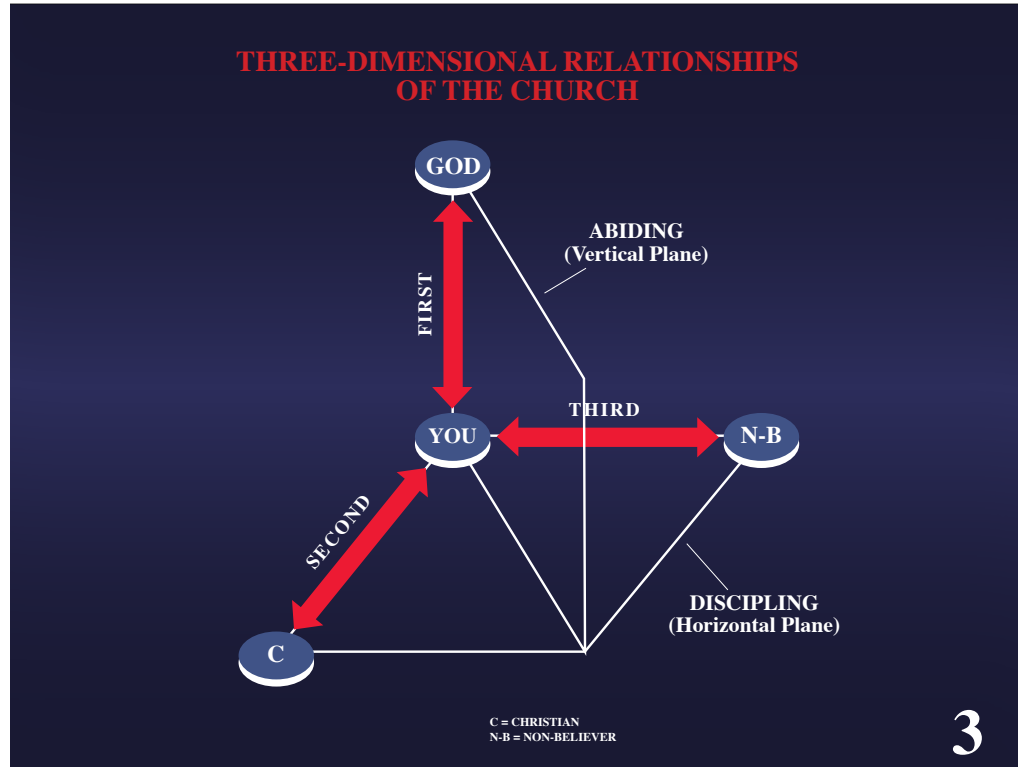
C = CHRISTIAN
N-B = NON-BELIEVER

2

Slide #3

The first-dimension, representing “loving or serving the Lord your God,” is on the vertical plane and is the believer’s responsibility of “abiding” in Christ. The second and third dimensions, relating to “loving or serving your neighbor as yourself,” are on the horizontal plane, involving the believer’s responsibility of “disciplining” others.

Jesus was asked by a legal expert of the Law, “Who is my neighbor?” (Luke 10:29) In the parable of the Good Samaritan (vv 30-37), He clarified that neighborliness had nothing to do with religious status, titles, or bloodlines. Rather, your neighbor is one whose need you see and whose need you can meet. When combined with love, it is placing the interests and needs of others above yourself—whether believer or non-believer.

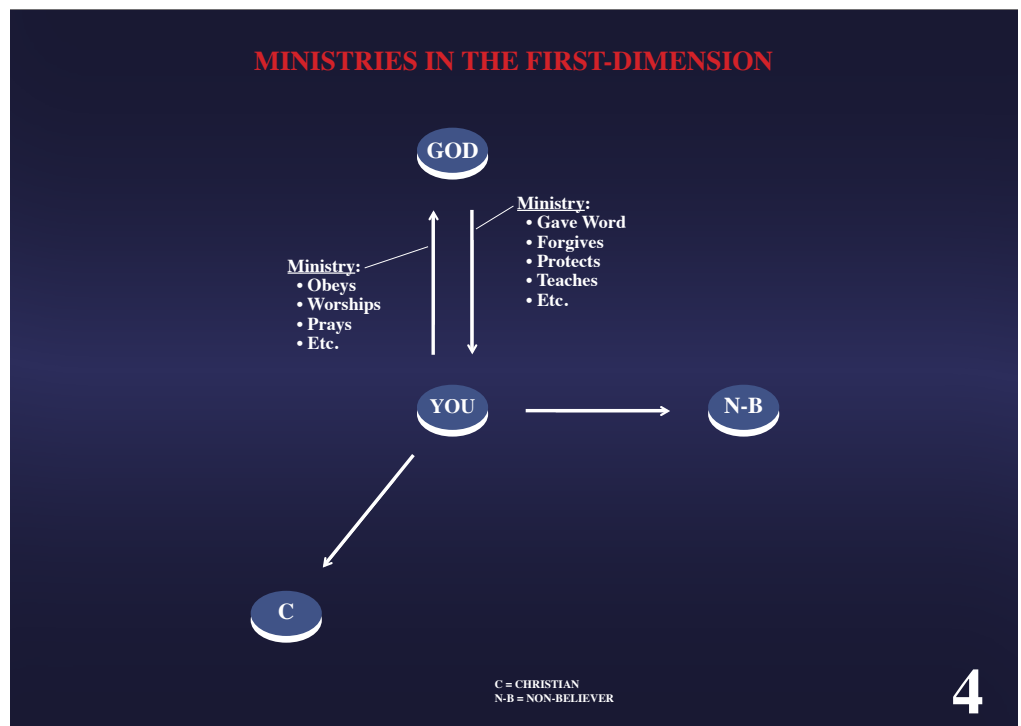


Slide #4

The first-dimensional relationship is between a believer and God. It is established on the basis of Christ’s work on the cross and through the believer’s trust in Christ for eternal life. Our union with Christ at the new birth sealed our relationship with God (Rom 6:3-7). God’s love for the world opened the way for experiencing a relationship with Him. “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son” (John 3:16a) and Christ’s death on the cross was “the satisfaction for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for *those of* the whole world (1 John 2:2). God provided the means for a relationship with Him, so what is man’s part? “Whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life” (John 3:16b)—believing results in having an eternal relationship with God.

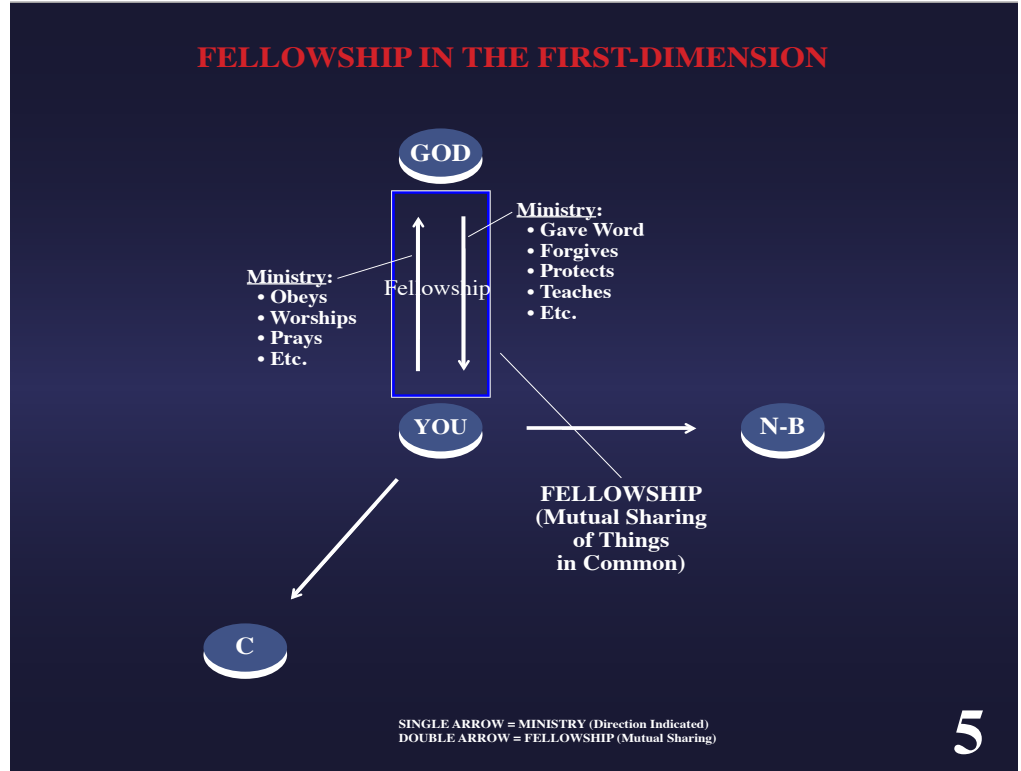
God’s continual, loving on our behalf is His ministry of service for our growth in maturity.

[Note: Ministry is represented by a single arrow, with direction indicated.] We have His Word that we might know His will plus He teaches, forgives and protects us. In light of God’s gracious actions, out of gratitude the Christian should respond in obedience. In fact, God desires our love expressed in obedient behavior: “He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me” (John 14:21). Our love for Him is also expressed on our worship and prayers.



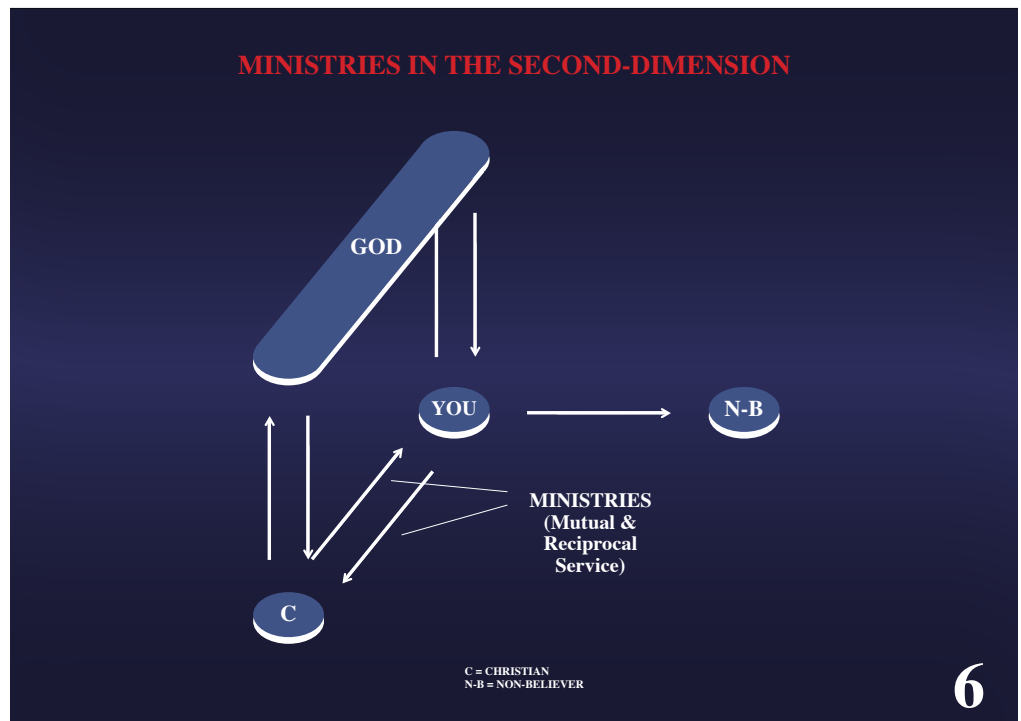
Slide #5

While relationships are established between two parties, only as the percipients serve one another though love will they experience a mutual sharing of things in common—spiritual fellowship (1 John 1:5-10). When this occurs, the Christian will have an abiding intimacy with Christ, found in the vine-and-the-branches teaching in John 15. Notice abiding and obeying go hand in hand: “If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love” (v 11). Living in abiding harmony with Christ results in fruit bearing or Christlikeness (v 2), answered prayer (v 7), and joy (v 11). These are the products of intimacy. We become like Him; we learn to pray in conformity to His Word; and what brings Him joy that also becomes ours.



Slide #6

The second-dimensional relationship is between believers. The basis is again the work of Christ. Each believer is member of the Body of Christ and equally an heir together of God’s grace. Because of the union in the Body, there is no qualitative distinction between them (1 Cor 12:12-13). As the Body of Christ functions in genuine mutual-and-reciprocal service to one another (Eph 4:15-16; Heb 10:24-25), Jesus’ instructions concerning “loving your neighbor as yourself” are accomplished. Remember biblical love is to seek another’s highest good by serving them (Gal 5:13-14).



Slide #7

As mentioned in the first dimension, fellowship is the mutual sharing of things in common. Christ's expectation was for His disciples to follow His example and occupy themselves with serving others rather than being served, serving as He served (John 13:14-15). In fact, He set a new standard.¹ "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another" (v 34). He upped the requirement from "loving your neighbor *as yourself*" to "loving your neighbor *as I loved*."

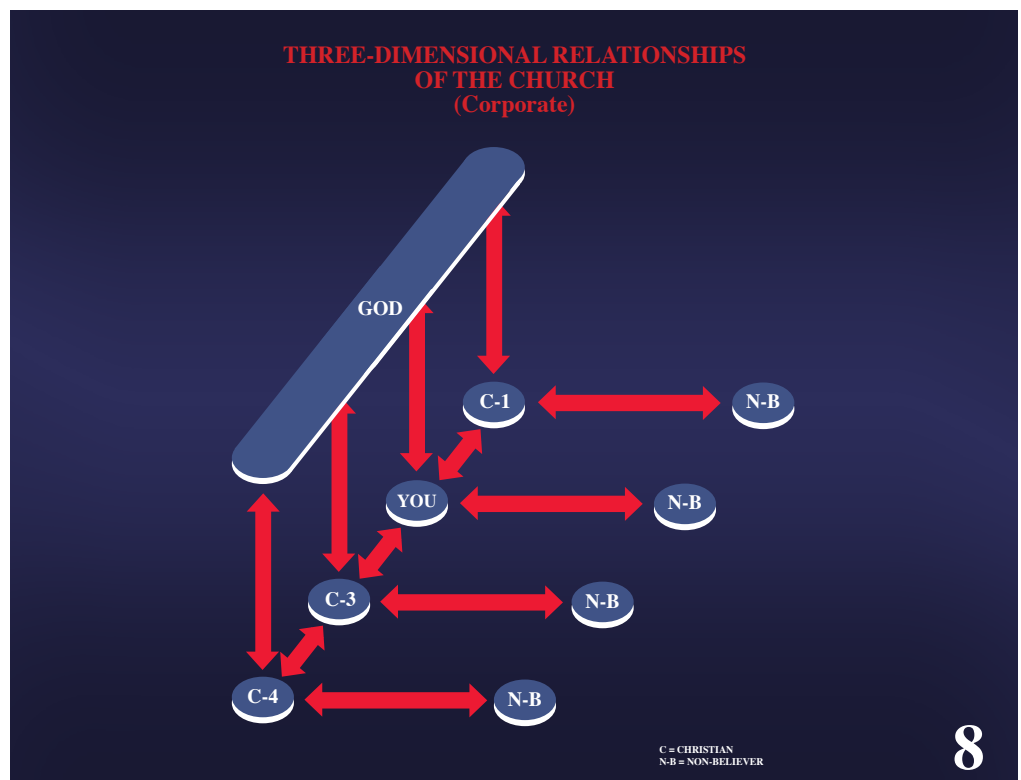
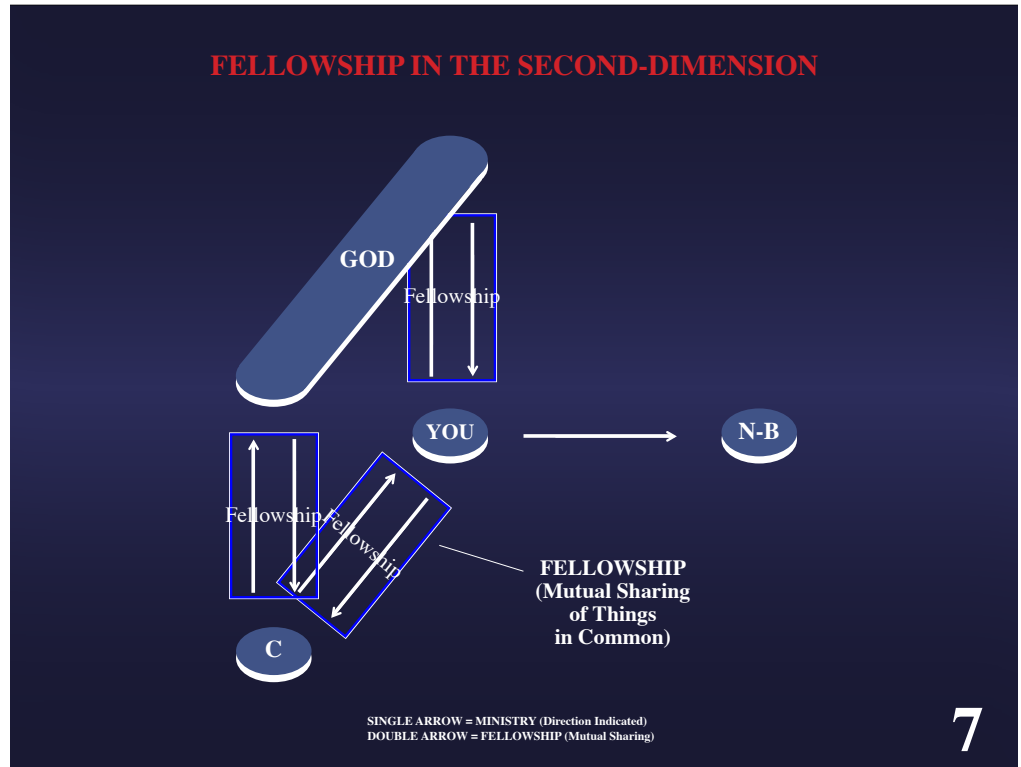
That commitment to biblical love within the Body of Christ results in fellowship between believers as well as strengthening fellowship between believers and God (1 John 1:1-4). On the other hand, failure to experience fellowship in the second dimension also negatively affects the Christian's fellowship with God. Consider Matthew 5:23-24:

23 Therefore if you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, 24 leave your offering there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering.

Suffice it to say that without the proper functioning of the Body in loving service to one another, fellowship between believers and between the believer and God is negatively impacted and spiritual vitality of the local assembly is diminished.

Slide #8

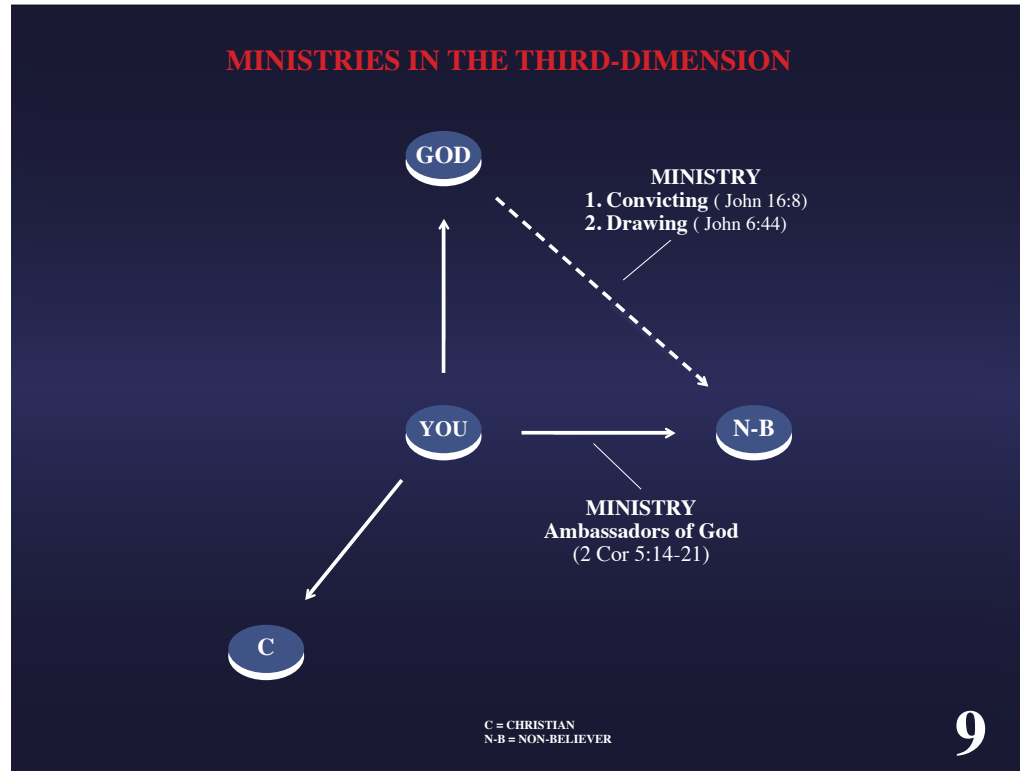
Since the church is made-up of many individual believers, the corporate body of believers creates an even more involved interplay of multiple relationships. Nevertheless, it is the individual responsibility of every believer to connect and function for the Body to mature (Eph 4:16).



Slide #9

Some find it hard to accept, but Christians are supposed to have relationships with non-believers. That is the third-dimensional relationship of ministry as ambassadors of God (2 Cor 5:14-21). *With-ness leads to witness.*

God begins that reaching out by the convicting work of the Holy Spirit (John 16:8-11) as He draws men to Himself (John 6:44). The God-ordained blend of divine work combined with friendships being developed by a believer toward his unbelieving neighbor results in the salvation of many. Note that a believer must intentionally reach out to establish connections in order for friendships to flourish with co-workers, with fellow-students, and with next-door neighbors.



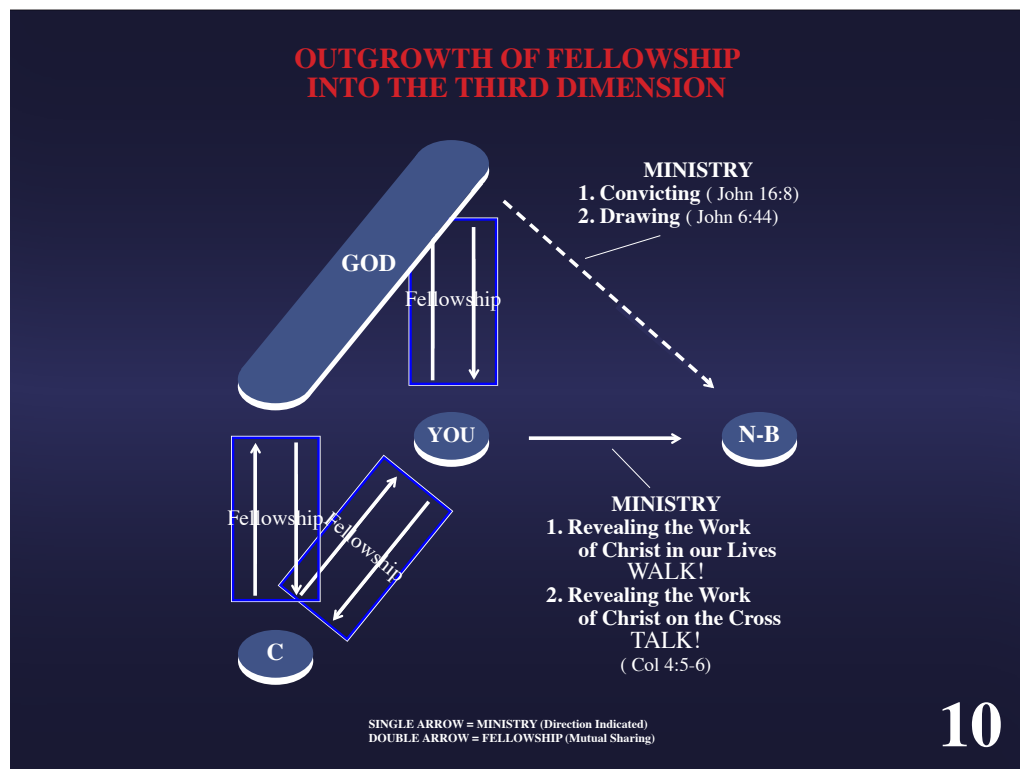
Slide #10

Three things are evident from this slide. First, while believers should have friendships with non-believers, they can never experience fellowship because there cannot be a mutual and common sharing of spiritual things. Second, the result of the proper functioning of the Body translates into the sharing of one's faith in Christ. Consider Acts 2:44, 46-47:

44 And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common... 46 Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house... 47 praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.

To say it another way, believers will not naturally and spontaneously share their faith if they are experiencing dysfunctional Body life. If intimate fellowship is not an experienced reality, they cannot share what they do not possess in their daily lives. But when experienced, Christians naturally portray that authenticity in their lives and spontaneously share the Word of life that others might come to faith. This is the walk-and-talk pattern which Paul taught in Colossians 4:5-6.

Finally, when Jesus said, "Go and make disciples" (Matt 28:19a), the prerequisite to making followers of Christ was "to go" to connect and interact with individuals who may or may not be favorable to the saving message. In fact, "Go" demands the



intentional establishment of personal connections through developing friendship with non-believers in the Christian’s spheres of influence. For those who trust in Christ, friendships are the natural means for integrating new believers into Christian fellowship, as they are encouraged to be baptized and taught to follow Christ in obedience to His commandments (vv 19b-20a). Consequently, “discipling” occurs on the horizontal plane within the second and third-dimensional relationships.

Slide #11

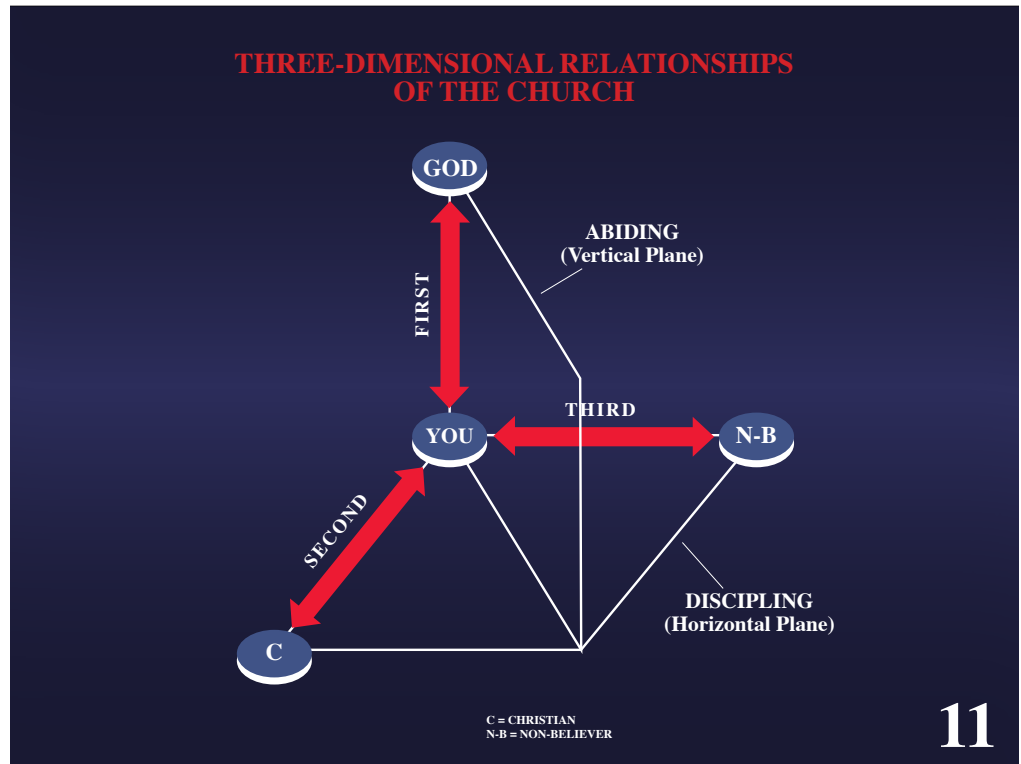
We have seen that the relational concerns for the church are multidimensional:

First dimension—between a believer and God

Second dimension—between a believer and a believer

Third dimension—between a believer and a non-believer

The first-dimensional relationship, representing “loving or serving the Lord your God,” is on the vertical plane and concerns the believer’s responsibility of “abiding” in Christ. The second and third-dimensional relationships, representing “loving or serving your neighbor (believer or non-believer) as yourself,” is on the horizontal plane and concerns the believer’s responsibility of “discipling.”



SUPPLEMENT
RELATIONAL-CONNECTION CLARIFIED
 (Source: Supplement A found in Appendix C of *Escape*)

Due to the emphasis on a “relationship” gospel, clarity regarding (1) the combination of words with the suffix *-ship* and (2) the theological use of the term *relationship* is warranted.

Combination of Words with the Suffix *-Ship*

Chart S-1 gives examples of words that are combined with the suffix *-ship*. In each case, a relational condition and connection is established. Notice the “finer distinctions” when nouns are used with the suffix *-ship*: skill (craftsmanship), position (professorship), rank (ladyship), and quantity (readership).² The remaining examples fall within the “status” category, as follows:

S-1

RELATIONAL CONNECTION
Suffix *-Ship* Designates Connection

WORD COMBINATION	DISTINCTION	RELATIONAL CONNECTION	CONCEPT
Craftsman + ship	Skill	worker to ability	Craftsmanship
Professor + ship	Position	teacher to school	Professorship
Lady + ship	Rank	dignitary to title	Ladyship
Reader + ship	Quantity	readers to author	Readership
Relation + ship	Status	item to item	Relationship
Friend + ship	Status	friend to friend	Friendship
Court + ship	Status	male to female	Courtship
Fellow + ship	Status	believer to believer	Fellowship
Disciple + ship	Status	learner to teacher	Discipleship

Relationship refers to a “state of being related” in reference to items, objects, people, etc. (e.g., subject-verb relationship, landlord-tenant relationship, love-hate relationship, and good-or-bad relationship).³ Nevertheless, in the 1940’s this term began to be used “specifically of romantic or sexual relationships.”⁴ Consequently, the current define-the-relationship (DTR) emphasis in dating is an outgrowth of the way the term *relationship* has transitioned. Obviously, the meanings of words change over time. However, the concern of this author is that other Christian writers now associate the term *relationship* with the Christian walk (sanctification). Even though never found in the New Testament, *relationship* has historically been used by the Church in reference to the new birth (justification). Consequently, justification and sanctification are being combined under a “relationship umbrella,” defined as both establishing a relationship and then growing in that relationship with Christ.

Friendship and *courtship* have both fallen out of favor to describe a growing affection and intimacy between people due to the popularity of the term *relationship*.

Fellowship in the New Testament, along with discipleship, is a word used to address the growing affection and intimacy between believers as well as between God and believers (sanctification). The following texts illustrate that fellowship should be preferred over relationship in reference to the Christian life, regarding God and other believers.

3 [W]hat we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have *fellowship* with us; and indeed our *fellowship* is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ...⁶ If we say that we have *fellowship* with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth; ⁷ but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have *fellowship* with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin (1 John 1:3, 6-7, emphasis added).

They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to *fellowship*, to the breaking of bread and to prayer (Acts 2:42, emphasis added).

Discipleship, likewise, is a word used in the New Testament to address the growing intimacy between Christ and committed followers (sanctification). A disciple is a learner or follower of a teacher, hoping to become just like the teacher. Notice that "discipleship" and "followership" would be biblically synonymous terms. Like fellowship, discipleship rather than relationship should be the preferred term used for sanctification, as the following texts illustrate.

A *pupil* [learner] is not above his *teacher*; but everyone, after he has been fully trained, will be like his *teacher* (Luke 6:40, emphasis mine).

And He was saying to *them* all, "If anyone wishes to *come after Me*, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me (Luke 9:23, emphasis mine).

26 If anyone *comes to Me*, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My *disciple*. 27 Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My *disciple* (Luke 14:26-27, emphasis added).

Theological Use of Relationship

How and why a term is used in theological discussions gives insight into the thrust of a person's theological position. Consider the following factors that surround the use of the term *relationship*.

Customary Use of Relationship

The current, popular use of the term *relationship* describes the Christian walk. However, historically *relationship* has been used to indicate the union between a believer and God at salvation, which is exclusively a justification issue when the believer is declared righteous.

Improbable Use of Relationship

The use of *relationship* in conjunction with sanctification or the Christian walk is questionable since other biblical words are used in reference to sanctification as a growing acquaintance and intimacy with Christ: fellowship and discipleship. John emphasizes fellowship in 1 John 1:3-7, while Luke's emphasis in Luke 9:23-25 and 14:26-27 is discipleship. In turn, Paul's concern was for believers to "walk with respect to the Spirit" (Rom 8:4; Gal 5:16) and John's use of the term *abiding* (John 15) likewise address a Christian's communion with God (sanctification).

Predictable Use of Relationship

It is not surprising that those with certain theological traditions of salvation (e.g., Catholic's faith + works position or Reformed's faith, which includes works as proof of faith, position) would embrace the term *relationship* since it merges justification with sanctification. Such usage corresponds to their theological faith-works ideology.⁵

Endnotes:

1. Gary Derickson and Earl Radmacher, *The Disciplemaker* (Salem, OR: Charis Press, 2001), 81.
2. www.english.stackexchange.com—search, *Is there any relation between the suffix “-ship” and actual ships?*
3. www.etymonline.com—search, *Relationship*.
4. Ibid.
5. www.leaderquest.org—see article, *Theological Positions on Salvation*.