

Once Apart, Now Together

Summary and Goal

All of us long to know and be known, but our desire goes beyond that. We long to be known *and accepted*. Our hearts yearn for the significance and the belonging that comes with a meaningful community. This appetite comes from our having been made in the image of God, who is a triune “community” by nature. Through the gospel, God brings us into fellowship with Himself and with others, and we are to carry out our mission to extend this fellowship to the world.

Main Passages

Romans 12:9-18

1 Corinthians 1:9

Philippians 1:3-7

Session Outline

1. Once apart from God, now we have fellowship with Christ (1 Cor. 1:9).
2. Once apart from the church, now we have fellowship (Rom. 12:9-18).
3. Once without purpose, now we have fellowship in the mission (Phil. 1:3-7).

Theological Theme

God changes us by bringing us into fellowship with Himself and with His people.

Christ Connection

Koinonia is the Greek word for fellowship, and it is used throughout the New Testament. As God’s people, we share fellowship with God through Jesus Christ because of His death and resurrection. As Christ’s people, we share fellowship with each other, loving one another as God has loved us.

Missional Application

God calls us to join with other believers as we share fellowship in our mission to extend the gospel to the ends of the earth.

Date of My Bible Study: _____

Session Plan

Once Apart, Now Together

Introduction Option

Play the video “What is Union with Christ?”:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vBJFiMPTzM4>

Then read the “Essential Christian Doctrine” *Union with Christ* (leader p. 106; PSG p. 83). Ask the following questions for discussion:

- Why is it natural for us to find identity in personal achievements and social groups?
- Why should union with Christ serve as the basis for Christian community?

? For Further Discussion

Why do you think some people are afraid of being fully known?

Pack Item 9: Community of the Cross

Calling attention to the Stott quote on this poster, ask the following questions:

- Why do we tend to minimize the importance of community with others?
- What characteristics should be evident in the community of the cross?

Introduction

Discuss the recent scientific study regarding cultural isolation and loneliness (leader p. 106; PSG p. 83).

- ? How have you seen or experienced the drift toward isolationism in our culture today?

Talk about the lack of community we suffer from as the result of sin in the world and in our lives (leader p. 106). Then summarize this session on how God changes us and brings us into fellowship with Him and with others (leader p. 106; PSG p. 84).

1. Once apart from God, now we have fellowship with Christ (1 Cor. 1:9).

Comment on the innate human sense of alienation we all feel and the only solution—Jesus Christ. Then read 1 Corinthians 1:9. Use the visual of the Jerusalem temple to explain what Paul was saying about fellowship with God through Christ (leader pp. 107-108; PSG pp. 84-85).

- ? What are some ways people of the world deal with the feeling and reality of loneliness?
- ? Why do you think people don't connect their own sense of loneliness to their lack of a relationship with God?

Mention how the world can only experience this kind of fellowship—peace, comfort, joy, acceptance by God—as shadows because the substance is found only in Christ. Be clear that this does not mean Christians will be spared from all suffering and pain (leader p. 108; PSG pp. 85-86).

- ? In a world full of broken relationships, how does it make you feel to know that in Christ, God both knows you completely and at the same time accepts you eternally?

2. Once apart from the church, now we have fellowship (Rom. 12:9-18).

Ask a volunteer to read Romans 12:9-18. Set forth that this passage shows us a picture of *koinonia*, or fellowship, in action. Draw attention to the vertical and horizontal aspects of reconciliation (leader pp. 109-110; PSG pp. 86-87).

- Looking again at Romans 12:9-18, which instruction stands out to you, and why?
- Why is it so important for the church to have these horizontal relationships in order?

Emphasize the beautiful stamete of grace-driven relationships and how living selflessly is countercultural. Make it clear that this is something *only the gospel* can do (leader pp. 110-111; PSG pp. 87-88).

- What might “outdoing one another in showing honor” look like in the community life of your group and church?

3. Once without purpose, now we have fellowship in the mission (Phil. 1:3-7).

Highlight how the church exists for a purpose that moves outwardly to the world. Then read Philippians 1:3-7. Explain that the community created by the gospel is a partnership to defend and confirm the gospel amongst those in the world (leader pp. 111-112; PSG pp. 88-89).

- Why might we struggle to commit ourselves to the mission of the church?

Point out that pursuing mission together means setting aside preferences and keeping focus on our real priorities (leader pp. 112-113; PSG p. 89).

- What are the dangers of failing to recognize that God is the One at work in and through us?
- What are the dangers of ignoring our role in the work of proclaiming the gospel to the world?

Conclusion

Restate that because of Christ, we are brought into relationship with God and into community with one another—realities that are central to the gospel (leader p. 113; PSG p. 90). *Apply the truths of this session with “His Mission, Your Mission”* (PSG p. 91).

? For Further Discussion

How does repentance always relate vertically to our relationship with God and yet often impacts our horizontal relationships?

What are some examples where repentance requires horizontal action?

Christ Connection: *Koinonia* is the Greek word for fellowship, and it is used throughout the New Testament. As God's people, we share fellowship with God through Jesus Christ because of His death and resurrection. As Christ's people, we share fellowship with each other, loving one another as God has loved us.

Missional Application: God calls us to join with other believers as we share fellowship in our mission to extend the gospel to the ends of the earth.

Expanded Session Content

Once Apart, Now Together

Voices from the Church

“Isolation and fear of man
are close companions.”²

—Edward T. Welch

99 Essential Christian Doctrines

71. Union with Christ

At the heart of our salvation is our union with Christ. The Bible describes salvation as entering into a covenant relationship with God and also describes the church (which is made up of believers) as the bride of Christ (2 Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:23-32). Christians believe that Christ dwells in our hearts through faith (Christ in us) and that we are simultaneously dwelling in Him (Eph. 3:17; Col. 1:27; 3:1-4). This union is indissoluble; it will last for all eternity.

Introduction

Almost twenty years ago, social scientist Robert Putnam published a book titled *Bowling Alone* about the collapse and revival of American community. Putnam’s main point was that individual Americans were becoming more and more, well, individualistic. He cited plenty of sociological data and demographic studies, but the title was drawn from the anecdotal consideration of one of America’s late, great communal pastimes—the bowling league. Where once men and women would congregate at their local lanes to experience camaraderie, teamwork, and the kind of social interaction integral to community happiness, more and more people were “bowling alone.”¹

In 2010, Putnam reported on a different trend, challenging some of his bolder claims about Americans’ personal isolationism, but the problem of cultural loneliness persists in various forms. Communal camaraderie may be making a comeback among Millennials who gather as groups in coffee shops, but in many parts of the country, neighborhoods are still full of people in close proximity who mostly keep to themselves.



How have you seen or experienced the drift toward isolationism in our culture today?

Session Summary

All of us, men and women alike, long to know and be known. But our desire goes beyond that. We long to be known *and accepted*. Our hearts yearn for the significance and the belonging that come with a meaningful community. This appetite comes from our having been made in the image of God, who is a “community” by nature—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit eternally co-existing in total equality and mutual love. The lack of community we suffer from is the result of sin in the world and in our lives. The gospel of Jesus answers this catastrophe of humanity and satisfies our deepest longings for community.

In this session, we will see how God changes us and brings us into fellowship with Himself and with others and how we are to carry out our mission to extend this fellowship to the world.

1. Once apart from God, now we have fellowship with Christ (1 Cor. 1:9).

We can trace the innate human sense of alienation all the way back to the first man and woman. When Adam and Eve disobeyed God, their rebellion had cataclysmic spiritual consequences as well as physical ramifications. But perhaps the biggest consequence of the fall of humanity was the death that resulted: both physical death, when our bodies will die, and spiritual death, a separation from God that has already taken place.

This separation from God is the deepest ache in every human being. Not all people are aware of what causes the ache, of course, but that doesn't make it any less real. Because our sin has divorced us from the God who made us, we struggle with loneliness, and with the messiness that results from seeking to cure it through relationships with other sinners. Nothing we do in our own power to make this ache go away will work because a divine disconnect requires a divine re-connect. Apart from God, we are doomed always to feel like eternal outsiders, even in the midst of many people.

But there is an answer, a way to end this ache and replace it once again with the vibrant relationship with God He intended from the beginning. And that answer rests in the person of Jesus Christ. Here is how Paul put it in 1 Corinthians 1:9.

⁹ God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

To appreciate the beauty and fullness of what Paul was saying here, it is helpful to think of the temple complex in Jerusalem. The temple was designed with a concentric circle approach. Each step closer to the center of the temple, the holy of holies, limited who could enter.

Starting from the outside, everyone was welcome to enter the court of the Gentiles, but only Israelites could proceed into the next level, the court of women. The next level in was only for Israelite men, and the level after that was only for priests.³ The innermost chamber was the holy of holies, where the ark of the covenant was located and where God's presence dwelled. Only the high priest could enter the holy of holies, and that only on one day of the year, the Day of Atonement (or Yom Kippur).

God's message was clear—He is a holy God, so entering into His presence is beyond any hope in this world. But there is a hope from outside of the world, and this hope has come into the world in Jesus. On account of Jesus' death, God tore from top to bottom the dividing veil barring access to the holy of holies, signifying that the divorce between God and people can only be reconciled from heaven. And in His resurrection, Jesus has conquered the death that our sin deserves, making reconciliation between exiled sinners and a holy God possible.

Further Commentary

“Paul concludes the thanksgiving with particular accent on the faithfulness of God...That God is faithful means that he is worthy of our belief, trust, and devotion. Faithfulness is covenant language that underscores God's trustworthiness to keep all of his promises. In linking God's faithfulness to their call into fellowship with the Son, Paul is thinking of their past conversion. The faithful God who saved them will be the one who 'keeps them strong' to the end (1:8). The calling language recalls the epithet 'called saints' in the opening salutation (1:2). 'Fellowship' means much more in Greek than it does in current English idiom. In Pauline usage the term carries the idea of participation and sharing, expressed also as being 'in Christ.' Their calling into participation with the Son sets the stage for the opening exhortation of the letter body to follow in 1:10, where Paul addresses the looming problem of a divided church, which is the antithesis of those called into intimate union with God's Son.”⁴

—Mark Taylor

Voices from Church History

“The Christian community is a community of the cross, for it has been brought into being by the cross, and the focus of its worship is the Lamb once slain, now glorified.”⁵

—John R. W. Stott (1921-2011)

Further Commentary

"In the introduction to 1 Corinthians, the word 'Lord' occurs more than in any other letter introduction of Paul (vv. 2,3,7,8,9). In this transition to the body of the letter, Paul again emphasized his theme—the authority of the Lord over his subjects. He acknowledged the Father's faithfulness to call the Corinthians into a unified fellowship with 'his Son, Jesus Christ,' who is Lord of the church."⁶

—F. Alan Tomlinson

Voices from Church History

"Has it ever occurred to you that one hundred pianos all tuned to the same fork are automatically tuned to each other? They are of one accord by being tuned, not to each other, but to another standard to which each one must individually bow. So one hundred worshipers met together, each one looking away to Christ, are in heart nearer to each other than they could possibly be, were they to become 'unity' conscious and turn their eyes away from God to strive for closer fellowship. Social religion is perfected when private religion is purified."⁷

—A. W. Tozer (1897-1963)

Where Adam sinned, Christ saved. Where Adam fell, Christ rose. Where Adam divided, Christ unites. And we who were once apart from God can now enjoy fellowship with Christ and flourish in that fellowship.

Because of the power of the gospel, we are never truly alone, even when we're all by ourselves. Our God is always with us; indeed, His Spirit has taken up residence in us, and we are "hidden with Christ in God" (Col. 3:3). This is what it means to be "called into the fellowship of his Son" (1 Cor. 1:9). We are now inextricably connected with Him in an eternal, unbreakable relationship.

Because we are in Christ, we are able to experience the loving fellowship our triune God has enjoyed for eternity. We are completely accepted by God and secure in our relationship with Him because our sin has been placed on Jesus, who paid its penalty for us, and in its place we have been credited with His righteousness. We are finally free to stand boldly, but humbly, before God (Heb. 10:19-22).

- ? What are some ways people of the world deal with the feeling and reality of loneliness?
- ? Why do you think people don't connect their own sense of loneliness to their lack of a relationship with God?

Our fellowship with Jesus also means that we can experience peace, comfort, and joy in our lives as we never have before. It is freeing to know God and be fully known and accepted by Him. God will always be there with us no matter what, always graciously loving us and extending His peace, comfort, and joy to us.

The world can only experience these as shadows because the substance is found only in Christ. That is not to say that we will be spared from all suffering and pain when we are in Christ. As we saw in the previous session, part of sharing in Christ's salvation is sharing in His sufferings. However, what this does mean is that we will be able to endure our suffering with patience, knowing that there is purpose in it. We are comforted knowing that suffering is temporary and that God is working to bring Himself glory through it.

This is the first and fundamental reconciliation of the gospel. It announces our way "back" to God through union with His Son, who has died for our sins and has risen for our eternal life in Him. But as we also saw in the previous session, the gospel is deep, and so, it goes even further than our individual reconciliation to God.

- ? In a world full of broken relationships, how does it make you feel to know that in Christ, God both knows you completely and at the same time accepts you eternally?

2. Once apart from the church, now we have fellowship (Rom. 12:9-18).

The primary “death” in the fall of humankind is the death of our relationship with God. Because of sin, we are separated from Him. But you will notice in Genesis 3 that Adam and Eve’s sin didn’t just separate them as individuals from God. It separated them from each other as well (Gen. 3:16). Sin has a relational impact all around.

With this in mind, we see that the gospel doesn’t just unite us to God in Christ but it unites us to God *together* in Christ. When we are brought into fellowship with Jesus, we are also brought into fellowship with all others who are reconciled in Christ, in a community called “the church.” We see plenty of pictures in the pages of the New Testament of the reconciling work of the gospel in community, but one of the most vivid—at least in portraying how the gospel works practically within the relationships of reconciled sinners in the church—is found in Romans 12:9-18:

⁹ Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. ¹⁰ Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor. ¹¹ Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord. ¹² Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. ¹³ Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality. ¹⁴ Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. ¹⁵ Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. ¹⁶ Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight. ¹⁷ Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. ¹⁸ If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.

This passage shows us a picture of *koinonia* in action. *Koinonia* is the Greek word for “fellowship,” and it is used throughout the New Testament. As God’s people, we share fellowship with God through Jesus Christ because of His death and resurrection, and as Christ’s people, we also share fellowship with each other, loving one another as God has loved us.

In Romans 12:9-18 we see sinners who have been reconciled vertically to God through Christ reflecting that reconciliation horizontally with one another. The two are fused together. If we are in Christ and loved by Him, we will love others and seek to live in unity together—a unity that is based on our shared identity in Christ and our love for Him.

We see relationships on these two planes joined together in the Ten Commandments as well. You will notice that the first four commandments correspond to our vertical relationship—have no other gods, don’t make any idols, don’t take the Lord’s name in vain, and keep the Sabbath. The last six commandments correspond to our horizontal relationships, telling us how to live in love with others around us.

Further Commentary

“God’s will is that his children become a family where the joys of one become the joys of all and the pain of one is gladly shared by all the others. The Christian experience is not one person against the world but one great family living out together the mandate to care for one another. So rejoice with those who are rejoicing, and weep with those who are weeping (v. 15). The elder brother in the account of the prodigal son provides an example of the failure to join in rejoicing (Luke 15:25-32). On the other hand, the Gospels record that upon meeting Mary following the death of her brother, ‘Jesus wept’ (John 11:35).”⁸

—Robert H. Mounce

Voices from Church History

“Into the community you were called, the call was not meant for you alone; in the community of the called you bear your cross, you struggle, you pray. You are not alone, even in death, and on the Last Day you will be only one member of the great congregation of Jesus Christ. If you scorn the fellowship of the brethren, you reject the call of Jesus Christ, and thus your solitude can only be hurtful to you.”⁹

—Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945)

Further Commentary

“Although Christians are urged not to ‘copy the behaviour and customs of the world,’ we are expected to remain relevant and impacting to the world. Swimming against the flow should not take us to a ‘Christian island’ where we become useless. We are the salt of the world. This saltiness is communicated through practical love. While the modern world may celebrate progress in science and technology, it is not progressing in love. While those outside the church may snub anything associated with ‘Christianity,’ they will not turn their backs on love. This is our contribution to the world—not the world’s kind of love that discriminates and is self-seeking, but God’s kind of love that breaks through barriers. Love gives more than it expects. Love braves hostility and seeks reconciliation.”¹⁰

—Africa Study Bible

Voices from the Church

“I go to church because God loves the church, and I want to love what God loves.”¹¹

—Trillia J. Newbell

Jesus Christ Himself summarized the law using this vertical/horizontal construct:

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. (Matt. 22:37-39)

The Ten Commandments and their summary in the two greatest commandments remind us that our sin sets us at hostility with God *and* with our fellow man. But the gospel of Jesus Christ brings reconciliation in both of these areas, providing the meaningful horizontal and vertical relationships God intended for us to enjoy in Eden.

- ❓ Looking again at Romans 12:9-18, which instruction stands out to you, and why?
- ❓ Why is it so important for the church to have these horizontal relationships in order?


As you look over the imperatives Paul listed in Romans 12, it doesn’t take long to notice the depth of relationship God desires of us. Romans 12:10 especially shows us the beautiful stalemate of grace-driven relationships—each party should seek to out-honor the other! Imagine if our churches were known for *this* kind of “deadlock,” where we were all busy not looking out for our own preferences and needs but for the building up of others, going out of our way to make sure others felt welcomed, encouraged, and comforted. Now that would lead to beautiful gospel community, but it would also make a mark on our culture around us. Living selflessly is countercultural. It is different, but different in a good way.

This is something the gospel does. It is something *only the gospel* can do. The gospel does not make us into little judges of each other, always evaluating others to see if they are living and serving the way they should. Nor does it make us people who keep sizing each other up, measuring each other, and rehearsing each other’s failings. The gospel is not tuned to the frequency of accusation.

Instead, the gospel is God’s love made manifest, and the church is the gospel of God’s love made visible. God’s love cannot puff us up; it cannot make us prideful; it cannot make us selfish; it cannot make us arrogant; it cannot make us rude; it cannot make us gossipy; it cannot make us accusers—because God’s love was poured out on us first as sinners. So the more we press into the gospel, the more the gospel takes over our hearts, the less we will see these sinful things and the more we will see what is expected in Romans 12:9-18.

We cannot grow in holiness and holier-than-thou-ness at the same time. So a church that centers itself on the gospel will face sin in its members head on. Whether it is hypocrisy or open rebellion, we must respond with “Remember the gospel! God loved you in spite of that sin; Christ died to free you from that sin; the Spirit dwells in you to convict you of that sin and strengthen you to turn from it.” If we would “abhor what is evil [and] hold fast to what is good” and encourage one another to do the same, we would see God’s grace coming to bear in us more and more.

Now, this surely frightens people who believe God has delegated His sovereignty to them, but all honor, glory, and power belong to Jesus Christ, our King, alone. It honors the gospel of Jesus, in whom there is no condemnation and through whom we are being built together, as we “outdo one another in showing honor” to one another. Remember, once we were apart from God, but now we have fellowship with Christ, and once we were apart from the church, but now we have fellowship together in Him.

 What might “outdoing one another in showing honor” look like in the community life of your group and church?

3. Once without purpose, now we have fellowship in the mission (Phil. 1:3-7).

When I think of being alone, I tend to think of extreme cases of isolation, like stories of people lost at sea or lost in the woods. The most clichéd of these scenarios, of course, is the deserted island story. The film *Cast Away*, starring Tom Hanks as island-stranded FedEx employee Chuck Nolan, is one of the better modern examples. The movie carries on largely in silence, reflecting the unnerving quiet and desperate loneliness Chuck continues to wrestle with. He is driven by his loneliness to the brink of despair, at one point even contemplating suicide. In the end, however, he is compelled to carry on because he commits himself to a single-minded purpose—getting off the island. In a way, Chuck is “saved” before he’s even rescued because his mission gives him a new zeal for living. His purpose gave him the one reason he needed to live.

The church is like this as well. We exist for a purpose, and that purpose gives our lives meaning. Imagine God reconciled us to Himself and to each other and our only response was to gather together to talk about the gospel amongst ourselves. What a short-changed experience of the gospel it would be if we failed to share what we have experienced with others! The movement of God to individuals and into the church culminates in an outward vision for the lost and unbelieving world. In Philippians 1:3-7, Paul wrote:

Further Commentary

“When Paul speaks of their ‘partnership in the gospel from the first day’ (1:5) he is probably thinking of the day he first arrived in Philippi, the most important city in Macedonia, after crossing the Aegean Sea on his second missionary journey (Acts 16:11-12). There he had met Lydia, ‘a dealer in purple cloth,’ who had received the gospel of Jesus Christ wholeheartedly. Not only did she believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, but she made her house available for meetings and worship (Acts 16:15,40). A Philippian jailer and his household had also become Christians (Acts 16:34). In view of the hospitality which Paul and Silas had received, it was appropriate to call the Philippian Christians partners in the gospel. This partnership continued until late in Paul’s life. At the time this letter was written, they were supporting him materially by sending gifts (4:18). When the message of the gospel reaches a receptive heart, it bears fruit and produces action.”¹²

—Eshetu Abate

Further Commentary

“Paul remembers them prayerfully, and the Philippians constantly cared for him practically. In a fallen world we will have trouble, and surely some of Paul’s memories were not good (e.g., the conduct of the magistrates and the populace toward him in Acts 16); but overall, Paul could be thankful. As he thought about the big picture, he gave thanks. Don’t allow a few stumbles and struggles to rob you of gratitude and joy. Take a view of the big picture and learn to give thanks to God. Recognize that Jesus has already taken care of your greatest problem through His cross and resurrection. Realize that there’s no condemnation for those who are in Christ. As you reflect on where God has brought you in His loving faithfulness and how He has reached down and rescued you, does it cause you to give thanks, and does it fill your heart with joy? As you think about people who have impacted you and the community of faith that surrounds you, does it cause you to give joyful thanks? That was the attitude of the greatest missionary in history.”¹³

—Tony Merida
and Francis Chan

³ I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, ⁴ always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, ⁵ because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. ⁶ And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. ⁷ It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel.

The community that is made by the gospel is seen here by Paul as a partnership. The reconciling work of the gospel won’t be complete until the day Jesus returns, but until then, this partnership works together to defend and confirm the gospel among those in the world. The gospel is not meant to be hoarded but generously proclaimed!

This means, of course, that many Christians have their understanding of the church upside down. Having been saved as individuals, they continue to see their faith as something personal—private even—and struggle to embrace the importance and depth of being a partner with others in the gospel. They attend church but might not truly invest in the work of the church; they might even give to the work but only because it is “safer” and puts some distance between actually serving with their hands.

But while the gospel may save us as individuals, it does not save us to an individualistic faith. What has reconciled us must now make us ministers of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:18). This means that we are not following through on our own gospel union with Christ if we aren’t joining the church on mission to share this gospel with an unbelieving world around us. Being part of the church is not above and beyond God’s calling for a Christian. It is not the icing on the cake. Partnering requires that we unite around the gospel, set aside or work through any and all other differences, and sacrificially pursue our shared mission together. That is not extra; it is at the core of the gospel’s implications.



Why might we struggle to commit ourselves to the mission of the church?

If we are pursuing mission together, we will need to set aside our preferences and keep focused on our real priorities. We will need to seek the flourishing of others instead of seeking our own fulfillment. We will strive to value church membership not for any privileges we may get but for the responsibilities and obligations that we can help fulfill. It’s about what we can give toward the mission of the church, not take from it.

That is a challenging way to see the church and ourselves, but don't miss who will make this happen. It is God who began a good work in us in providing us with salvation who will carry it out to completion. God is at work in us and through us. We are to work in our role of advancing the gospel, but we are to work in God's empowerment.

We are all in this together. And even if we're in a church, if we aren't engaging in the partnership of the gospel mission in meaningful ways, we will be opening ourselves back up to the loneliness the gospel is meant to dispel. In *Cast Away*, Chuck found purpose in pursuing rescue. But thanks to Christ, we are already rescued! Now our mission together is to announce that rescue is available to a lost and dying world.

Let's not be stingy with the grace God so generously has given and continues to give to us.

- ❓ What are the dangers of failing to recognize that God is the One at work in and through us?
- ❓ What are the dangers of ignoring our role in the work of proclaiming the gospel to the world?

Conclusion

Our sin and selfishness drive us toward isolation, and our culture only adds to it. We want to be in meaningful community, to enjoy vibrant fulfilling relationships, but we can't on our own. But where we cannot, God can. God has made a way—*the way*—to experience relationship with Him and with others that satisfies the deepest longings of our souls. That way, of course, is through Christ. Because of Christ, we are brought into relationship with God and we are brought into community with one another.

These vertical and horizontal relationships are not tangent to the gospel; they are not side benefits of it—they are at its core. The gospel centers on relationship, and that is why we have both the freedom and the calling to invest in these relationships as fully as possible. Everything we do should be impacted by these relationships made possible in Christ. Love brought us into relationship, and that same love sends us out to bring others into the same fellowship.

CHRIST CONNECTION: *Koinonia* is the Greek word for fellowship, and it is used throughout the New Testament. As God's people, we share fellowship with God through Jesus Christ because of His death and resurrection. As Christ's people, we share fellowship with each other, loving one another as God has loved us.

Voices from the Church

"The completion of the Great Commission will include great suffering, but eternity will prove it is worth the price."¹⁴

—David Platt

Voices from Church History

"The church which is not a missionary church will be a missing church when Jesus comes."¹⁵

—F. B. Meyer (1847-1929)

Additional Resources

Once Apart, Now Together

References

1. Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000).
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3. M. Pierce Matheny Jr., Chad Brand, and Bruce Hall, "Temple of Jerusalem," in *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Nashville: B&H, 2015), 1544.
4. Mark Taylor, *1 Corinthians*, vol. 28 in *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: B&H, 2014) [WORDsearch].
5. John R. W. Stott, *The Cross of Christ* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2006), 266.
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Study Material

- "See the Good, Enjoy One Another"—Chapter 10 from *Side by Side: Walking with Others in Wisdom and Love* by Edward T. Welch
- "8 Preachable Marks of a Transformed Life"—Sermon by Philip Nation; find a link to this sermon at GospelProject.com/AdditionalResources
- Previous *Biblical Illustrator* articles, including "To Practice Hospitality," can be purchased, along with other articles for this quarter, at LifeWay.com/BiblicalIllustrator. Look for Bundles: The Gospel Project.

Sermon

David Choi: "Philippians 1:1-11"

Find a link to this at GospelProject.com/AdditionalResources

Tip of the Week

Foster Openness and Discussion

"Instead of thinking about the most effective way you can teach, think instead about what question you might ask in order to help someone else in your group articulate the information. It's okay if you stand at the front and simply give out the information, but it will be a more engaging and memorable experience if people come to the same conclusion seemingly on their own. After all, the goal is for truth to be expounded."¹⁶