



08

SESSION EIGHT

Once Apart, Now Together

SESSION SUMMARY

This session helps us understand how God changes us and brings us into fellowship with Him and with others. We will also learn how we are called to carry out the mission God has given us—to extend this fellowship to the world around us.

SCRIPTURE

Romans 12:9-18; 1 Corinthians 1:9; Philippians 1:3-7

THE POINT

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

INTRO/STARTER 5-10 MINUTES

Option 1

Almost twenty years ago, political scientist Robert Putnam published a book titled *Bowling Alone*. It was apparently about the collapse of what he saw as the American community. Putnam's point was that Americans were becoming more individualistic. He cited plenty of sociological data and demographic studies, but the title was drawn from the consideration of one of America's great community activities—the bowling league. Men and women used to gather at their local lanes to experience friendship, teamwork, and the kind of social interaction integral to community happiness; however, Putnam noted that more and more people were “bowling alone.”¹

While Putnam may have exaggerated the problem about Americans' personal isolation a bit, cultural loneliness is a real thing. Today, the coffee shop, rather than the bowling alley, is the place most people gather. While it is not uncommon to see groups hanging out in local coffee shops, most of the customers are having coffee alone, often kept company only by earbuds, books, computers, or cell phones. The value of community may be making a comeback among Millennials, but in many parts of our country, neighborhoods are filled with people who are close in proximity but not in relationship.

- **How have you seen or experienced this drift toward being isolated in our culture today?**

Option 2

Place students in two to three equal groups, depending on the size of your class. Then, from each group ask for a volunteer to help you with an activity. Then, explain to students that they will be playing trivia, answering questions from the previous week's lesson. The volunteer will be playing against the rest of their group—the group can discuss answers to questions, but will only have 30 seconds to write out their answer on an index card. The individual volunteer will have one minute to come up with an answer, but cannot consult with other students or the internet, and can only ask one yes-or-no question of the teacher. If able, allow each student to experience being on a “team” alone. To make sure students have adequate time to experience being on a team and playing as individuals, only ask one question per rotation. Here are some questions to use while playing trivia:

- What does God deliver us from?
- How does He give us life?
- What passage did we cover last week?
- Who wrote that passage?
- Who was the original audience?

After each student has rotated through, ask them whether it was more difficult to answer the questions on their own or as part of a group. God created us to go through life with Him. We work with Him and other believers to share the gospel message with a lost and dying world.

HIS STORY

15-20 MINUTES

THE POINT

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

CHARACTERS

- **Paul:** former persecutor who became a Christ-follower and apostle to the Gentiles

PLOT

All people want to know others and be known, but our desire goes beyond that: We long to be known and accepted. Our hearts desire the significance and belonging that comes with meaningful community. This desire comes from being made in the image of God. While sin may have brought brokenness to what it means to know and be known, the gospel brings healing and restoration to the meaningful community we all seek.

FELLOWSHIP WITH BELIEVERS

Believers love one another as God has loved us.

LIFE IN THE SPIRIT

Works of the flesh versus the fruit of the Spirit

SPIRITUAL WARFARE

Standing firm with the armor of God

WE NOW HAVE FELLOWSHIP WITH CHRIST

We can trace our natural human sense of alienation all the way back to the first man and woman. Adam and Eve were made free and sinless by a good God who gave them dominion over all they could see. They were made to fellowship with God and one another and to grow in that fellowship. However, when they disobeyed God, their rebellion had spiritually fatal consequences. Yes, there were physical ramifications—work became tiresome, birth became painful, and the ground itself was cursed toward their difficulty. Still, the biggest consequence of the fall was the death that resulted both physical death—when we will be separated from the body—and spiritual death—separation from God.

Thankfully, there is an answer, a way to end this ache, a way to replace it with the vibrant relationship with God He intended from the beginning. That answer rests in the person of Jesus Christ. Take a look at the way Paul explained it:

9 God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. (1 Cor. 1:9)

Through the power of the gospel, we are never truly alone, even when no one else is around. Our God is always with us; His Spirit has taken up residence in us, and we are “hidden with Christ in God” (Col. 3:3). This is what it means that God called us into fellowship with Jesus. We are personally connected now in an eternal, unbreakable relationship with Him.

Our fellowship with Jesus also means we can experience peace, comfort, and joy in our lives in ways we never have before. It is freeing to know God and be fully known and accepted by Him. No matter what, God will always be there with us; 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. This does not mean we will be spared from all suffering and pain when we are in Christ because, as we saw in the last session, part of sharing in Christ is sharing in His sufferings. However, this does mean we will be able to patiently endure our suffering, because we know it is temporary and not without purpose, and God is working to bring Himself glory through it.

Our reconciliation with Christ is fundamental to what the gospel is about. It announces our way back to God through union with His Son, who died for our sins and rose for our eternal life in Him. But the gospel runs deeper and further than our individual reconciliation to God.

- **Describe a time when you felt you had true community or fellowship. How does fellowship with Christ differ from that? How is it similar?**
(p.60, PSG)

WE NOW HAVE FELLOWSHIP WITH OTHERS

The primary “death” in the fall of mankind is the death of our relationship with God. Because of sin, we are separated from Him. Even Adam and Eve’s sin didn’t just separate them from God individually; it separated them from each other as well (Gen. 3:16). Sin influences all relationships.

So, 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 other people who are reconciled in Christ. The New Testament refers to this community of reconciliation in Christ as the church. The New Testament frequently shows the reconciling work of the gospel in community, but one of the most vivid—at least in showing how the gospel works practically in 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. (Rom. 12:9-18)

This passage shows us a picture of fellowship in action. 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.

Here, Paul wrote about sinners who have been reconciled to God (vertically) 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.

As you look over the commands Paul listed, it doesn’t take long to notice the depth of relationship God desires of us. Each person seeks to “out-honor” the other. Imagine if our churches were known for being busy building up others, and going out of our way to make sure others felt welcomed, encouraged, and comforted rather than looking out for our own preferences and needs. That would certainly lead to beautiful gospel community, but it would also make a mark on the culture around us. Living as selflessly as this passage described is counter-cultural; it will make us look different, but in a good way.

WE NOW HAVE A COMMON MISSION

We exist for a purpose that gives our lives meaning. We would be short-changing the gospel if we gathered together to talk about the gospel but failed to share it with others; especially since God reconciled us to Himself and to each other! When God moves within individuals and the church, it creates an outward vision of the gospel for a lost and unbelieving world. In Philippians 1:3-7, Paul wrote:

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. (Phil. 1:3-7)

Paul saw the gospel community as a “partnership.” The reconciling work of the gospel isn’t seen as being complete until this partnership results in sharing the gospel with those around us.

While the gospel may save us as individuals, it does not save us to an individualistic faith. What has reconciled us, makes us ministers of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:18). This means 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 those who don’t know Him. 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 with other believers requires us to unite around the gospel, set aside or work through all other differences, and sacrificially pursue our shared mission together. This is not an extra requirement; it is at the core of the gospel.

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

This is certainly a challenging way to see the church and ourselves, but don’t miss who will make this happen. God is the One who began this work in us, and it is God who will complete it (Phil. 1:6); He is at work in us and through us. Therefore, we work in our role of advancing the gospel, but God empowers us to work.

- **What are some ways you can begin looking at your small group, church, or youth group as a partnership in sharing the gospel?**
(p. 62, PSG)

TIMELINE

GENEROUS LIVING
A model and motivation for generosity

THE HALL OF FAITH
Examples of living by faith

**Beginning Summer 2018*

THE PLOT AGAINST PAUL
Jews organized a conspiracy to kill Paul.

99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

Union with Christ (p. 61, PSG)

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

CHRIST CONNECTION

Fellowship is an important theme throughout the Bible, especially in 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.

YOUR STORY

10-15 MINUTES

GROUP QUESTIONS

God's Story has always been designed to connect with your story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own.

- **Do you ever struggle with feelings of loneliness? Where and how do you seek encouragement to fight against it?** *Answers will vary.*
- **Why do you think many people don't connect their own sense of loneliness to their lack of a relationship with God?** *People often incorrectly believe something in this world might fulfill their longings and desires. However, that is faulty thinking. As C. S. Lewis once stated, "If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world."² In other words, God created us with these longings, which are ultimately fulfilled in Him.*
- **Looking at the church of Rome as an example of a church centered on the gospel, what areas do you see today's churches struggling with the most? What is most difficult for you? Why?** *Answers will vary.*
- **In a world full of broken relationships, how does it make you feel to know that God knows you completely and at the same time accepts you eternally?** *Answers will vary.*

HIS STORY

God's Story of Redemption, through His Son, Jesus Christ.

YOUR STORY

Where your story meets His.

YOUR MISSION

10-15 MINUTES



HEAD

Our sin and selfishness drive us toward isolation and our culture only adds to it. We want to be in meaningful community—to enjoy fulfilling relationships—but we can't on our own. But 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 community with one another.

- **How does a right relationship with God create the opportunity to have meaningful relationships with other people?** *It allows us to see others in God's image, gives us the motivation and grace to forgive others as we have been forgiven, and so forth.*
- **What are some daily habits and choices that lead us toward isolation from others? What are some changes we can make in those areas?** *Answers might include burying ourselves in our video games, books, homework, hobbies, and so on.*



HEART

The gospel is God's love revealed, and the church is the gospel of God's love made visible. And God's love cannot make us prideful, selfish, arrogant, rude, gossipy, or accusers. So the more we press into the gospel, the more the gospel takes over our hearts, the more we will see something similar to what occurred in Romans 12:9-18.

- **What do we stand to lose if we seek to honor others ahead of ourselves? What do we stand to gain?** *Answers will vary.*
- **What would it look like in the community life of your group and church to outdo each other in honoring others?** *Answers will vary.*



HANDS

Many Christians have their understanding of the church upside down. Having been saved as individuals, they tend to see their faith only as something personal—private even—and struggle to embrace the importance and depth of being a partner in the gospel with others. They attend church, but might not truly invest in the work of the church. Or they might partner in the work of the church in safer, somewhat distanced ways such as through giving money, but not through serving.

- **Why do you think it is sometimes difficult to move away from individualism and toward the mission of the church?** *Sometimes selfishness can get in the way, or even the idea that our time belongs to us and can be used however we desire, and the like.*
- **What does the idea of being a partner on gospel mission mean for your daily routines—at school, home, and so on?** *Answers will vary.*

► ADDITIONAL INFO

LEADER PACK

For this session, refer students to pack items #4, #12, and #13, which contain informational posters on the books of Romans, 1 Corinthians, and Philippians.

SOURCES

1. "About the book," *Bowling Alone*, accessed September 6, 2017, <http://bowlingalone.com/>.
2. C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: HarperCollins, 1980), 136-137.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Check out the following additional resources:

- **Leader Training Videos**
- **One Conversations**
- **Midweek Studies (to access your Midweek Study, go to lifeway.com/TGPSPR18Letters)**
- **Circular Timeline Poster**
- **App (for both leader and student)**



Additional suggestions for specific groups are available at
GospelProject.com/AdditionalResources

And for **free online training** on how to lead a group visit
MinistryGrid.com/web/TheGospelProject