

HOW JESUS CHANGES LIVES
“A Community That Changes Us”
Scripture: Phil 1:3-13; 2:3-4; 3:7-11

Delivered at Central Baptist Church on September 15, 2019, by Pastor Steven Edelman

(SLIDE 1) Introduction:

As a pastor, I sometimes hear the words, “I am feeling lonely.” Loneliness involves that deep feeling that you don’t belong, and no one cares. It may come from a lack of friends or company. It’s not just a Victoria problem or introvert problem. It’s a reality for many single people, married people, seniors, pastors, young adults, and teenagers.

In a world of self-checkouts, self-banking, self-serve, Instagram stories, and apps like SkipTheDishes, people are feeling lonelier than ever. By design, our society is setting us up for shallow relationships.

In Japan, it’s becoming a trend that guys and girls are seeking connection by creating their own virtual companions who they engage with to try and connect. In this technological age, one can stipulate the terms of the virtual relationship. For example, when setting up the virtual companion, you could choose someone with the right hair color, eyes, and soothing voice. When you want them... you could say “Hey Meggie!” “Hi Steven! How are you today?” You would pick someone who is always complimentary, “Are you working out? Did you do something new with your hair?” Someone who makes you feel like you are the center of the universe, “What would you like for supper? I think you should make the choice tonight as you are so wonderful!” The only inconvenience is that when their phone battery runs out and you are reminded that you are truly alone!

The Montreal Gazette reports that “Some suggest that we are experiencing an “epidemic of loneliness.” Indeed, research shows that around one in five Canadians experience some level of loneliness or isolation. The most at-risk group are the elderly due to their lack of mobility and shrinking social networks; however, studies suggest that loneliness also peaks in adolescents. **According to the most recent figures from Statistics Canada, the 2016 census indicated that 28 percent of households had only one person living in them, a record high.**”

In addition, technology has significantly **reduced the number of opportunities for human interaction**. Indeed, the rise of social media may mean that people spend less time engaging in meaningful social interactions with others.

We may be more connected than ever before, yet we feel more alone and unknown than ever before in human history. Why? It’s because our lives are structured for convenience and isolation, rather than community. It’s self-serving. Skip the interaction. It’s virtual friendships.

As you are going to see, the answer to loneliness involves building our lives around gospel-centered community. It’s also how we find meaning and break the cycle of individualism. Rather than reducing human interaction, the gospel changes human interaction. Gospel-centered community is something that we all need. It’s something that we crave. It’s what we were designed for. It’s something that we need to structure our life around. Let me remind you, Gospel-centered community is even for average Canadian like Daiton Lingard!

Last week, we kicked off a series in Acts on ‘How Jesus Changes Lives’ through gospel renewal. What we mean by ‘Gospel Renewal’ is that when we are changed by the gospel, we start to be used by God to change the rest of the world through Jesus working in our lives. But today, we are going to jump out of the book of Acts and into the future. It’s kind of like Star Wars where they start in the future and fill us in on the past many years later.

In short, God uses Lydia and the small group meetings in her house to start a church in Philippi. Paul is celebrating what God has done through this gospel-centered community. The church in Philippi is special

for Paul as it was the first church he founded in Europe (see Acts 16:6-40). As pastor Barton was saying last week, Lydia in one of the first converts in the area. She is a wealthy businesswoman who plays a significant role in the Philippian church.

Today, we will focus on how Paul brought renewal as he invited others into community. He invites people like Lydia to host a Community Group in her home. Both Paul and Jesus' take incarnational (life on life) approach to those around him so they would see the gospel being lived out. Gospel renewal does not happen on its own; it happens as we participate in gospel-centered community.

So, let's begin by looking at the importance of participating in community.

(SLIDE 2) To participate in God's gospel transformation, we need to be in community.

First, gospel centered community leads us to participate with what God is doing.

(SLIDE 3)

1. GOSPEL CENTERED COMMUNITY LEADS US TO PARTICIPATION

What do we mean by participating in gospel transformation? "Participate" means to "take part in, engage in, get involved in, share in, play a part or role in, be associated with; cooperate in, help with, assist in, build relationship around" to help bring the hope and renewal to those people in your life because you have been changed by Jesus. Be in the mess of people's lives. **The word community can be used so differently, what we mean is that we are participating in a life on life relationship for the gospel.**

Paul's develops people who participate together for the gospel (1:5)

Look with me at verse 1:3-5 which says, *"³I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, ⁴always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, ⁵because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now."*

Notice the words "*partnership in the gospel.*" The Greek word for partnership is "**koinonia**" which means fellowship, close relationship, communion, and fellowship in the gospel. In other words, the idea of koinonia or partnership is similar to the idea of two colleagues who have gone into business together. They are committed to the same venture. Over the years, I have been involved in starting two business and there is constant communication, refinement, and redirecting of time, resources, people to the main purpose.

In this case, Paul is talking about sharing Christ with others. The gospel is the glue for partnership because friends are committed to a common cause or goal and flourishes through their common pursuit of it.¹ **The gospel brings about community when it's front and center.** This partnership can help us share our time and our resources.

If you jump back to Acts 16, Lydia was transformed by Christ and it says others in her household were baptized. She then participated in what God was doing by opening her to home and life to others. As a result, a church was established in Philippi because Lydia participated and built gospel-centered community. It grew because of her investment, her initiative, her courage, and her ministry.

***Paul continues to talk about partnership.**

Look with me at Philippians 1:27 which says, "Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are **standing firm in one spirit**, with **one mind striving side by side** for the faith of the gospel."

Here we see community helped them to stand firm in one spirit:

i. Stand firm in one spirit (SLIDE 4)

As we heard a couple of weeks ago, we need to fight for unity. To *stand firm* was not easy. The story of Christ is the rule for community of believers to ground themselves by. Christians must not flee, compromise, give in, back down, or be divided when they face opposition or difficulty. The command to *stand firm* was used to indicate the duty of the soldier in battle, or to draw the line concerning what side you are on. In this

¹ Hughes, R. K. (2007). [*Philippians: the fellowship of the gospel*](#) (p. 23). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books.

case, God's or Satan's. Are you advancing God's kingdom or is Satan getting the best of you because you are focused on fighting each other? **This is why Paul is saying to work hard at being one in community.**

ii. **Striving together (SLIDE 5)**

The word striving is simply an old English word for *fighting*. It is the very same word that we would render "fight." **Paul wanted them to fight side by side so that unity is not lost. It's not to fight amongst each other but fight together against a common foe.** And what were they to fight for? They are called to fight together in partnership to advance and protect the gospel.

If you keep reading though Philippians we continue to see partnership with Paul.

➤ **Paul's partnership with Timothy (2:19-24) (SLIDE 6)**

In Philippians 2:22, Paul tells others of his partnership with Timothy. He says, Timothy was like "a son with a father he has served with me in the gospel." He describes a close family-like relationship in his partnership.

We continue to see this partnership language when Paul talks about Epaphroditus.

➤ **Paul's partnership with Epaphroditus (2:25-30) (SLIDE 7)**

In Philippians 2:25-30, Paul says, "*Epaphroditus my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier, and your messenger and minister to my need.*" He uses this language that describes a close relationship and gospel-centered mission. "My brother and fellow worker, fellow soldier, messenger, and minister to my need."

ILLUSTRATION: A gospel-centered community is like a two-legged race. (We are called to be tied to each other as we participate as on body). **Driven by the Holy Spirit, community is the primary vehicle that Jesus and Paul use for gospel renewal.**

APPLICATION:

To see this lived out - you and I need friends. Just like Paul and Jesus who regularly spent time with others in community. It may be really difficult at times to keep the gospel front and center. It may be hard to work together. It could be hard to stay connected. However, we see many examples of this beautiful thing that grows from both Jesus and now with Paul. Just like **Paul we need to make gospel togetherness a regular part of our rhythm. As you spend time in a community that is centered around Jesus, you start to move toward purposeful connection and away from loneliness.**

What a gospel-centered community is not.

A gospel centered community is not a group of people who only study the Bible together. It's a group that is moving beyond knowing things about God and living them out in gospel partnership. Another pitfall is that we can get caught up in just doing good things like social justice or service projects without sharing the good news. Furthermore, groups can easily become focused on fellowship like playing games, watching sports, crafting, BBQ, and good projects rather than living out the gospel together.

Here is the question of the day. Who are you partnered with, so the gospel is transforming you and others? Can you identify them by name? For some it may mean joining a Community Group. For some it may mean participating. For some it may mean making sure the gospel is front and center in your friendships.

Jesus wants us to move beyond aimless self-serve isolation of private lives and beyond the superficial social contacts that pass for "Christian living." Paul is saying, work hard and even fight for togetherness to keep the gospel central. It's key part of what it means to be a Christian and renew our community with the gospel.

Secondly, we need gospel centered community because it changes us.

(SLIDE 8)

2. GOSPEL CENTERED COMMUNITY CHANGES US

a) Do nothing out of selfish ambition (2:3) (SLIDE 9)

Look with me at chapter 2 verse 3, which says, "³*Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit...*"

Paul is saying that we need to follow the example of Christ. To put it positively, we need to put others first by putting our preferences or self-love aside. Do not work to lift yourself up. If we created a meme it would be selfishness destroys community. It's in community that we realize we are just like everyone else. We all have problems. We all need Christ. Selfishness leads us away from togetherness.

(SLIDE 10) Jon Bloom says, “**Our selfishness is a master of disguise, wearing a thousand masks to cover its motives. Our selfishness is a wordsmith — bending, shaping, and sometimes twisting rationales for why our preferences are reasonable and right and even righteous (and, of course, best).**”

How many times have you thrown out the lame excuse to do what God has asked you to do?

For example, our selfishness or excuses for not participating in a gospel community could be endless. It could be, “I need my Netflix time! Community Groups are not for me. I am introverted. My life is full already. It's too hard to get the kids out the door!” Maybe you have attended a group, but don't participate because you don't want to say something foolish! Or you don't like the study, or the people leading the study!

To drive the point home, our self-focused natures lead to loneliness, disconnection, no accountability, hiding, and not being known by others.

Paul is reminding us to get over ourselves so that we can participate in gospel-centred community.

How do we get over ourselves? It's by finding humility through Christ.

b) In humility consider others above yourselves (2:3-4) (SLIDE 11)

Let me show you that it's humility that moves us into participation and gospel-centered community.

Look with me at chapter 2:3-4 which says, “*but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. ⁴Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.*”

The word for humility means to make yourself lower than others. True humility frees you from focusing on yourself and your kingdom. We sometimes get confused and act like it's OUR kingdom. When it's God's kingdom! To be humble is to serve others for their good and it also turns out to be good for us.

- For example, humility exercised in community helps us learn to:
 - 1) **Love one another:** John 13:34-35; 15:12,17; Romans 12:10; 13:8; 14:13; 1 Thessalonians 3:12; 4:9; 2 Thessalonians 1:3; 1 Peter 1:22; 1 John 3:11, 3:22; 4:8; 23; 4:7, 11-12; 2 John 1:5
 - 2) **Serve one another:** Galatians 5:13; 21; Philippians 2:3; 1 Peter 4:9; 5:5
 - 3) **Accept one another:** Romans 15:7, 14
 - 4) **Strengthen one another:** Romans 14:19
 - 5) **Encourage one another:** Romans 14:19; 15:14; Colossians 3:16; 1 Thessalonians 5:11; Hebrews 3:13; 10:24-25
 - 6) **Care for one another:** Galatians 6:2
 - 7) **Forgive one another:** Ephesians 4:32; Colossians 3:13
 - 8) **Submit to one another:** Ephesians 5:21; 1 Peter 5:5
 - 9) **Commit to one another:** 1 John 3:16
 - 10) **Build trust with one another:** 1 John 1:7
 - 11) **Be devoted to one another:** Romans 12:10
 - 12) **Be patient with one another:** Ephesians 4:2; Colossians 3:13
 - 13) **Be interested in one another:** Philippians 2:4
 - 14) **Be accountable to one another:** Ephesians 5:21
 - 15) **Confess to one another:** James 5:16
 - 16) **Live in harmony with one another:** Romans 12:16
 - 17) **Instruct one another:** Romans 16:16
 - 18) **Spur one another on toward love and good deeds:** Hebrews 10:24

You can't do this alone. In terms of finding freedom from sin, it takes humility and community to overcome. When we are in community and confess to one another, sin loses its power over you. It breaks the cycle of self-deception and secrecy.

(SLIDE 12) Dietrich Bonhoeffer says, “**A man (or woman) who confesses his sins in the presence of a brother (or sister) knows that he is no longer alone with himself; he experiences the presence of God in the reality of the other person.**” Do you see how the gospel works in our own life as we are in close community?

It's within community, we learn to live out the call and humility of Jesus. When we are facing problems or challenges, we don't need to face them alone. It could be marriage problems, single parenting, depression, jealousy, apathy, pain, loss, or trying to be something we are not. In real relationships, we are known, loved, and challenged... And it gets real! It gets messy.

(SLIDE 13) Brad Lomenick says, “**We impress people through our strengths, but we truly connect with people through our weaknesses and areas of struggle.**”

- **We also have the ultimate example of humility demonstrated right in the very nature of God himself.**

Look with me at Philippians 2:5 which says, “*Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.*”

This gives us a major insight into how God operates as three in one. It tells us that God is relational and operates in perfect community and unity. Yet, there is diversity because there are three distinct persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In the very nature of God we see community being exemplified for us.

We see more examples of community built right into His design from the beginning:

- i. Marriage: Husband and Wife.
- ii. Family: Kids relating to parents.
- iii. Friendship: Being connected because they enjoy each other's company.
- iv. The Body or Church: Being connected to other believers.
- v. Groups: Connecting people to each other and to God.

But it's in humility that we build relationship well. It's in humility that we do marriage, family, singleness, friendships, work relationships, and Community Groups like the one who emptied himself. There is a beauty in harmony in God's way of togetherness. In the same way, there is something organically beautiful about community that grows out of putting Christ at the Center.

Right in the very nature of God we have we see the example of community that challenges our selfishness and shows us the value of living out our faith in relationship.

God calls us to togetherness to changes us by moving us from selfishness to the humility of Christ.

Lastly, gospel-centered community leads others to Christ.

(SLIDE 14)

3. GOSPEL CENTERED COMMUNITY LEADS OTHERS TO CHRIST

a) Paul's sacrifice for the gospel (1:12) (SLIDE 15)

Look with me at Philippians 1:12 which says, “I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel...”

Paul is referring to being thrown in prison. He was writing this from a prison cell because of the gospel. He was willing to sacrifice his ease and comfort to build gospel centered community. He laboured

abundantly, he gave his time, talent, and treasure to tell others about Christ. To the point of death. He sacrificed it all.

Why does Paul do this? So that Jesus will be known! In Acts 16 Lydia and the Philippian jailer comes to Christ. But, notice that Jesus doesn't just hang out, bond over recreational sports, or chill at a local coffee shop. He doesn't just run a Bible study. **He exchanges His comfortable relationships for relationships of growth and renewal.** As a result, he suffers.

What is it that you need to sacrifice to participate in gospel centered community? It may be your comfort.

(SLIDE 16) Paul Trip writes, “**Comfort, you look beautiful to me right now, but when did you ever leave your place of prominence and glory to humble yourself for me? Comfort, when did you ever enter my world to suffer on my behalf? Comfort, when did you ever shed your blood so that I could be cleansed from sin? Comfort, when were you ever raised from the dead on my behalf? When did you ever promise to give me new life and power? Comfort, when did you ever promise to send the Holy Spirit to fill me with true comfort that would help me to please God, even when my earthly comfort was threatened? Comfort, when did you ever promise to intercede for me to my Father in heaven, so that I could be strong in trial? Comfort, when did you ever promise to come again and redeem me from the things that capture me and make me their slave?**”

Paul sacrifices for the gospel because he knows what he gains is far better.

b) Paul's gains for the gospel (3:7-11) (SLIDE 17)

Look with me at Philippians 3:7-9 which says, “*But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith— that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.*”

Paul is telling us that a gospel-centered life is worth it because we gain Christ. We may have difficulties, but we gain Christ. When we participate in gospel community we become like Christ. We start to realize that everything else is rubbish in comparison to Jesus! The selfishness. The isolation. The kingdom you are building for yourself is nothing in comparison to knowing Christ. When we participate in authentic gospel community others will see Christ.

The gospel doesn't lead to loneliness. The gospel is the remedy to loneliness and all the sin that we all face. The gospel **transforms our heart, resulting in attitudes, thoughts, and behaviors becoming more like Christ. Do you need to be changed?**

Do you want to be known? Loved? Feel like you belong? I believe Jesus will meet those needs as you participate in gospel relationships.

The dream would be to have many of these gospel-centered communities that we call Community Groups. They are communities of people that challenge us to orient our whole lives around Jesus—because the Bible is not just a book we study, but a book that informs the way we live.

As a response, you may need to:

- 1. Maybe your heart needs to be changed by Christ as a first step.**
- 2. Evaluate your schedule, so you grow in relationships that are centered around the gospel. Can you identify a couple of people in your life?**
- 3. Join a Community Group.**
- 4. Facilitate a Community Group.**