



grow. pray. study.

August 4, 2024 *Jesus and the Power of Community*

Scripture: Romans 12:1-6a, NRSV

We need connection with others

MONDAY 8.5.24 Ecclesiastes 4:7-12, Genesis 2:18

Genesis 2 stated a human truth: it isn't ideal for any of us to be all alone. Ecclesiastes 4 expanded on that simple statement, describing the tragedy of great wealth with no human connections as a "terrible obsession." It showed the antidote for that with down-to-earth images of helping someone up after falling, staying warm on a cold night and weaving a three-ply cord. That's a basic reason why God called people (not one isolated individual) to follow God: doing it together fills a basic human need.

- The wisdom teacher of Ecclesiastes, sometimes seen as bitterly cynical, valued the warmth of human friendship. "Two are better than one," he wrote. They "can help each other, can keep each other warm and safe." * He added that "a three-ply cord doesn't easily snap," which "may imply that three companions are even better than two." * In what ways have you found strength in facing life with a trusted, supportive group, rather than all alone?
- If we pay attention (it can be hard), mission partners in Africa highlight the tragedy of over 100 million orphans and helpless children due to the AIDS epidemic. In Bible times, "orphans are used to depict loss, vulnerability and social disruption.... the plight of the widow and orphan often occur in tandem in the Scriptures." ** One key New Testament image for God's people was "family" (e.g. [Romans 12:10](#)). [Click here](#) to learn about the ways Resurrection fosters human connections.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank you for keeping your promise not to leave me as an orphan. Teach me how to claim you as my Companion and Comforter and join with others in your family to help each other on our spiritual journeys. Amen.

* Brent A. Strawn, study notes on Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 in *The CEB Study Bible*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2013, p. 1061 OT.

** Article "Orphan" in Leland Ryken, James C. Wilhoit and Tremper Longman III, general editors, *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998, p. 615.

Jesus invited you to his “one flock”

TUESDAY 8.6.24 John 10:7-10, 14-16

Jesus chose a bold metaphor when he called himself “the good shepherd.” Shepherds occupied one of the lowest Israelite social rungs in Jesus’ day. But his words drew deeply from the prophet Ezekiel (cf. [Ezekiel 34:1-16](#)) in which God promised Israel that he would shepherd them himself. Jesus came as “the good shepherd” who would safely guide and protect all who trusted him. He called all “sheep” to join his “flock,” so that together they might find “life to the fullest.”

- Sheep can’t care for themselves—an isolated sheep is among earth’s most vulnerable animals. A shepherd must be wise and dependable, working for the interests and safety of each sheep in the flock. Humans aren’t sheep—we must choose to trust. What influences and events have moved you toward trusting Jesus, and people who genuinely follow Jesus? When have Jesus and his people been shepherd(s) for you? In what ways do you most need “shepherding” today?
- Scholar William Barclay noted, “The Greek phrase used for having [life] more abundantly means to have a superabundance of a thing. To be a follower of Jesus, to know who he is and what he means, is to have a superabundance of life.” * When has following Jesus led you to times that left you feeling deeply, fully alive? How can you continue to live out the joyous “superabundance” of life Jesus offers, encouraging others in that life and encouraged by them?

Prayer: Dear Jesus, I choose to trust you to be my shepherd. Shelter me, care for me, and guide me to the truly good life—a life shared with your people and enfolded in your love. Amen.

* William Barclay, *The Gospel of John—Volume 2 Chapters 8–21* (Revised Edition). Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1976, p. 60.

Welcome each other... the way Christ welcomed you

WEDNESDAY 8.7.24 Romans 14:13-19, 15:1-7

If you choose to worship and serve at Resurrection, you may automatically think of a big building when you hear or read the word “church.” But Paul’s letters (including his masterful letter to Roman Christians) went to a set of smaller “house churches” (cf. [Romans 16:3-5](#)—more like the gatherings we call “small groups”). They didn’t always agree on how best to live their faith. It’s okay to differ on the details, Paul said. The central, non-negotiable demand is to “build each other up” in love.

- “Welcome each other, **in the same way that Christ also welcomed you.**” In what ways does that set a high, serious standard? On the other hand, could you see Christ’s model as setting a “low” norm for acceptance, one even a woman caught in adultery or a thief on a cross could pass? Which do you find more challenging: the “height” or the “lowness” of Paul’s standard of relating to each other “in the same way that Christ also welcomed you”?
- Scholar N. T. Wright summed up Romans 14:13 this way: “Don’t pass judgment on each other—but **do** use your judgment in not tripping each other up!” * How do you see the difference between having your own tastes or opinions, even strongly held ones, and hurtfully passing judgment on someone who does things differently than you would? How did Paul call on believers, as members of the family of faith, to act toward each other?

Prayer: Dear God, when I behave in ways that fall short of your dreams for my life, you offer me your grace and accepting love. You call me to treat others the same way you’ve treated me. Help me to keep living into that calling. Amen.

Beyond casual socializing

THURSDAY 8.8.24 James 5:16-18

Resurrection offers settings in which people build friendships, but their purpose runs a lot deeper than joining a bridge club or knitting circle at a community center. “Every human being wants to **be known** and to **do good** things in and for the world.... These opportunities are an exciting blend of learning and community.” * Dr. David Hubbard described today’s passage as showing that “prayer is often corporate—other members of Christ’s body can share the experience with us.” **

- The prophet Elijah’s story is in [1 Kings 17-18](#). James stressed prayer’s power with that story. Scholar N. T. Wright wrote, “Every Christian has not only the right but the vocation to engage in... prayer for one another, prayer for the sick, prayer for the sinners, prayer for the nation and the world. If everyone who reads these words would... devote half an hour every day to this task, the effect could be incalculable.” *** Why not pray daily and enlist church friends as prayer partners?
- One of James’ phrases might scare you: “confess your sins to each other and pray for each other.” Our culture trains most of us to share only safe, positive feelings or events, never to admit failures. John Wesley’s early Methodist groups got great spiritual power from building a climate of trust in which honest confession could lead to accountability and prayer support for each other. How can you find trustworthy spiritual companions to help take your faith journey deeper?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you (as God in the flesh) prayed seriously and often. Thank you for inviting me to talk with you often, and listen for your inner leading, alone and with others. Amen.

* Excerpted from <https://resurrection.church/discipleship/>.

** David A. Hubbard, *The Book of James: Wisdom That Works*. Waco, TX: Word Books, 1980, p. 127.

*** Wright, N. T., *Early Christian Letters for Everyone* (The New Testament for Everyone) (p. 43). Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press. Kindle Edition.

A concise guide to treating each other well

FRIDAY 8.9.24 Colossians 3:12-14

The Apostle Paul described to the Colossian Christians how they should treat each other living and gathering in community. The virtues he listed were not qualities a hermit would need for living in isolation—they were about loving and living well with others. Paul knew that being compassionate, kind, humble, gentle, patient, and forgiving produced a strongly bonded community. But even more, as Christians followed Jesus’ perfect example, they would draw people who didn’t know him to Jesus.

- Treating one another with love is essential for any unified and bonded community, and certainly for small groups. When we love one another by showing compassion, kindness, forgiveness, and more, we show others that we care about them which builds trust. Can you recall a time when someone treated you with any of the qualities in this passage? How did that affect the way you saw or related to that person? Did it shift the way(s) you treated other people?
- Paul set this as the standard for how all followers of Jesus should treat each other. “There is an expected way to live that bears witness to the truth of the gospel within a person.” * Paul also said in [Romans 3:23](#) that all of us fall short. What relationships in your life could use a little (or a lot) more compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, forgiveness, and love? What good results would living this way be likely to have in those relationships?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank you for being the perfect example of this loving life for us. Please forgive me when I don't treat others with love as often as I should. Help me to be more like you each day. Amen.

* Andrew Purves, study note on Colossians 3:1-17 in *The Renovare Spiritual Formation Bible*. HarperSanFrancisco, 2005, p. 2143.

Growing to spiritual maturity together

SATURDAY 8.10.24 Ephesians 4:12-16

The apostle Paul made it crystal clear that following Christ means joining with other people making that spiritual journey. Finding deep unity with Christ and with one another challenges our human nature, so God calls us to sharing and accountability. One key way Resurrection aims to help is by supporting discipleship classes and small groups. Worship last week gave you the invitation to “deepen your knowledge of God and build relationships with your cohort this Fall!” * In these options we can help one another become spiritually mature so that nothing can knock us off course.

“Personal growth and community growth work together here so that mature believers contribute to a mature church. The energy for each aspect of this is supplied by Christ.” *

- Changing the world by building God's kingdom calls us to take our faith beyond just one weekend worship service and into creating sustained, sustaining relationships. How can you nurture spiritual maturity in yourself and others in your day-to-day life, building up the body of believers in love? “Paul sees growth as increasing in discernment and discretion, which helps believers avoid being taken in by false shortcuts to growth.” *** How can you motivate yourself and others to press on toward spiritual maturity when it isn't easy or quick? “God's goal,” Ephesians said, “is for us to become mature adults... measured by the standard of the fullness of Christ.” The passage went on to say one key to helping each other grow is “speaking the truth in love.” Which do you find harder as you relate to others: speaking the truth at all, or doing so in love? How can taking part in spiritually healthy groups help you grow toward maturity in both of those dimensions?

Prayer: Lord God, dwell in my heart. Keep me daily growing more mature in you. Thank you for your love and grace, in my life and in the lives of others—the safe environment in which I grow best. Amen.

* From <https://resurrection.church/discipleship/>.

** Timothy G. Gombis, study note on Ephesians 4:16 in *The CEB Study Bible*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2013, p. 369 NT.

*** *Ibid.*, study note on Ephesians 4:14.

Prayer Requests – cor.org/prayer *Prayers of peace and comfort for:*