

Session One: Gathered by the Gospel

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[0 : 00] Hey guys, my name is Travis.

Welcome to Gospel Growth, One Harbors, one-on-one discipleship course. In the last module, we looked at that a disciple of Jesus starts off by getting the gospel.

In this module, we will look at how disciples are gathered around the gospel for the sake of the gospel, by the gospel. We have said several times already that a Christian isn't just someone with a relationship with God.

They're someone that's been connected to Jesus' body, the church. That means that community is central to what it means to be a Christian. The gospel doesn't just save us, it reconciles us to one another.

We are gathered by the gospel. Studies show that people feel more isolated and less connected than they have ever felt.

[1 : 04] Meanwhile, we have new technologies offering new ways to get connected. And we might have Facebook friends and Twitter followers, but many of us still feel like we are disconnected from the type of community that we're really longing for.

So our culture has more options than we've ever had, but we are lonelier than we have ever been. And part of this is that we want real community.

And community itself is, by nature, really, really hard. Well, how is it hard? Well, it's demanding. It's high cost. It's high commitment in a culture that, at times, is very low commitment.

Community is uncomfortable at times. It forces us outside of our comfort zones and confronts us with people that are not like us or don't always act like us or think like us.

Community is messy at times. Stay in any relationship long enough, and people will hurt you or let you down. However, when we look into the scriptures and what they say about community and the community that the Bible reveals to us, we see something amazing.

[2 : 14] We see a foundation for community that exists within the church. And it's unlike any other community that we see. What are most communities based on and grounded in?

How do you pick your friends? How do people in your life, how have you chosen them, right? How do we look for that? I know how I tend to do it.

I seek out people that are just like me, that they act like me, they dress like me, they like some of the things that I like. But that's not what we see in the incredible community in the early church at all.

The gospel unites unlikely people. When Jesus first ascended, he left behind a pretty small, intimate group of followers.

It was a small group that had been together for years. They knew one another very well. They had a lot of things in common. But all that was about to change.

[3 : 11] And I'm not going to read it, but you see in Acts chapter 2 at Pentecost, thousands of people from all over the known world were gathered from corners of the globe together for a feast.

And so I encourage you to read that in Acts chapter 2. So these people were from all over the place, from different countries. They spoke different languages. They didn't watch the same TV shows or cheer for the same sports teams or have the same hobbies.

There were different classes and different cultures and different personality types. But we see an amazing thing take place. Look at this with me in verse 41 of Acts 2.

So those who received his word were baptized. And there were added that day about 3,000 souls. So in one chapter, that tight-knit group of 120 who were as close as family is now blown up into a mega church of over 3,000 people.

It's quite amazing. Now, some of you would have probably left at that point. That is not what you signed up for. You wanted an intimate gathering of non-intimidating people who are mostly just like you.

[4 : 18] And it's easy to over-romanticize the community of the early church and think that it just happened naturally and easily. Well, that's just not the case. Actually, it would have been totally chaotic with all kinds of relational challenges.

But it is immediately after these 3,000 people from different countries and cultures are added to the community that we get the most powerful picture of community in the entire Bible.

Acts 2.42. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. What a beautiful verse. All who believed had all things in common.

I mean, most of these people had absolutely nothing in common. And because they believed they had all things in common, how do people who live so differently and just simply are so different come together?

Well, this is what the gospel does. It unites us in Christ. The gospel takes people who have nothing in common. It unites them to have all things in common.

[5 : 22] I love what D.A. Carson says about this. He says, The church itself is not made up of natural friends. It is made up of natural enemies. What binds us together is not common education, common race, common income levels, common politics, common nationality, common accents, common jobs, or anything else.

Anything else of that sort that bind most people together. Christians come together. Christians come together not because they form a natural community, but because they have been saved by Jesus Christ and they owe him a common allegiance.

This does not come naturally. But it is what the gospel compels us to do. The gospel is that we were once far from God, but through Christ we have been brought near to God.

And also brought near to everyone who has been brought near to God. I love how Paul puts this in Ephesians chapter 2. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God.

Built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone. In whom the whole structure being joined together grows into a holy temple in the Lord.

[6 : 43] In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit. And we see here that we are united when the gospel is at the center.

Paul says that we are fellow citizens joined to one another. Growing together, built together when Christ is the cornerstone. Now what is a cornerstone?

Well this is a building metaphor. And cornerstones in modern building methods are more or less obsolete. But the principle here is beautiful. The cornerstone sets the placement and direction for the rest of the measurements.

I just built a deck at my house. I set the corner post first. And from this post I built the rest of the deck. All the other beams have that corner post in common.

And it's simple to make the connection to Christ here. Christ is the cornerstone. When he is the most central and most beautiful part of your life.

[7 : 44] You want unity in the church? Make Christ the cornerstone. And everyone else who has been built around Christ will immediately become family to you. You might be a Christian.

But if you are not being profoundly shaped by Jesus and his grace upon your soul in your life. Then you won't feel affinity for other people who are being shaped by Jesus and that same grace.

A whole bunch of people playing church do not have a lot in common. But a group of people built into a cornerstone. A group of people whose experience of grace and experience of Christ is most pivotal in their life.

This group will have radical community. Because it isn't based off their hobbies or their backgrounds. It's based on Christ. How does this happen?

Well what experience of grace are you most talking about in your groups of friends? What is fundamentally shaping your reality in your life?

[8 : 47] The gospel tells us that if anyone ever had the right to be prejudiced against other people and anyone else. It was Christ towards us. He was the eternal creator.

Entirely unlike us. He was perfectly holy. And we were not. We were dust. If anyone had the right to distance himself from anyone.

Christ could have distanced himself from us. And yet he came to us. He walked among us. And he even died for us. He died so that you could be reconciled together to God.

He died to create a new humanity. That was formed not around our ethnicity but around his grace and his supremacy. If the gospel grabs your heart church.

Christ becomes your cornerstone. And if he is your cornerstone. He isn't just someone that you're supposed to sing to on Sunday. He is becoming your everything.

[9 : 46] And that unites you all to everybody else in which he is becoming their everything. The gospel brings people together to feast on the one thing that can satisfy us.

And that is Jesus. I recently went to Shackelford Banks. Which is an island close to our region here. And as I sat on the beach I observed a young man and his girlfriend come up on a canoe.

And it was quite a long journey to come on a canoe. But the sun and the waves and the beach was so beautiful. It was worth the journey.

A few hours later an old historic wooden yacht that had been beautifully restored. Worth likely millions and millions of dollars. Came and anchored not far from where the canoe had showed up.

To enjoy the same waves and same beach and same beauty at the banks. That is a picture of the church. We have found something that we love.

[10 : 46] That satisfies us. We come from different places. We come looking differently. But we come for a common love that we have found. And we gather around the body and the blood and the beauty of Jesus.

The nourishing meal of the gospel. When we get this. When we bleed this. When the gospel gets in our bones. It changes us.

And it creates the most amazing community. Unlike anything we see anywhere else in the world. So as you discuss today around your group.

What do you think about when you think about the gospel? Do you think about all of the personal aspects of the gospel? Or do you see the power the gospel has over all who gather around it.

And gathers because of it.