

COMMUNITY

4

BUILDING COMMUNITY

Part 2

Philippians 2:1–18

By Mark D. Coakley
and Beth Crawford

“How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity!”
Psalm 133:1

“No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main.”

John Donne

“Christian brotherhood is not an ideal which we must realize; it is rather a reality created by God in Christ in which we may participate.”

Dietrich Bonhoeffer

“If Christ’s example is to be followed, then it is better to be concerned about other people’s rights and our own duties than about our own rights and other people’s duties.”

F. F. Bruce

AIM OF THE STUDY

- To understand the basics of community building and why it is imperative that every Christ-follower participate in community.

KEY VERSES

“If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.”

Philippians 2:1–4

PREPARATION

Read over the notes on “**How to Teach the Bible in Small Group**” and “**Some Practical Suggestions for Leading a Small Group Discussion**” in Vineyard Church of Columbus’ *Small Group Leadership Training Manual*. Before you read over the Scripture, pray that God would give you direction for leading your group and teach you something relevant. Then read through the passage and the Bible study below. **You will need to go over the questions and choose which ones you want to emphasize and which you could eliminate if your time is limited.** Note that the application questions are marked with an asterisk (*). Rather than leaving these to the end of the study, ask one or two as you work through the passage so people are being confronted by Scripture’s truths and applying them to their own lives. If you find you are falling behind schedule and need to move ahead, you could summarize some of the passage and then go to the final questions.

These studies contain more background material and information on the passages than any group will cover in a meeting. The authors are providing this for the leaders’ benefit—to help reduce your study and preparation time; to provide resources for possible questions group members may raise; and to clarify some gray areas of doctrine that may be in your mind as you prepare. Obviously, we cannot exhaust any one subject in a document like this, so you may want to do further reading and discuss doctrine with your pastor. We highly recommend *The New Bible Dictionary* or *The New Bible Commentary* as excellent resources for study.

OPENERS

[Beth Crawford contributed the following story.]

Fellow church members offered tremendous support before, during, and after the birth of our first child. My husband was a full-time graduate student, I had just been laid off from my job, and our closest relatives lived four hours away. The women in the church organized a lovely baby shower, which my mother and sister attended. Since we hadn’t been in the church very long, and I had worked most of the time, I had trouble introducing my family to

some of the women because I didn't even know all of their last names. Nevertheless, they gave gladly and generously and prayed for us. Some of the women purchased a stroller for us; it lasted through two energetic boys! One leader in the church loaned us a crib; another loaned us a changing table.

Our home group continually prayed and encouraged us, especially during the last five weeks of pregnancy. At a routine check up, our obstetrician detected an irregular heartbeat in our unborn child. The doctor admitted that there was nothing he could do about that, and if the baby's heart stopped, even emergency surgery would be too late. So, our home group members laid hands on me that week and prayed for healing and protection. At the next checkup, the baby's heart was normal. The following week, the doctor said the heartbeat was irregular once more. We shared this with our group, and they prayed over us again. Thankfully that was the last of the irregularity. While I was in labor, my husband called two of our church leaders and asked them to intercede. Despite high levels of pitocin to induce and speed up delivery, it looked like I would have a very long labor. Whenever the hospital staff administered any pain relief, contractions slowed down. But, within fifteen minutes of our leaders' praying specifically for labor to advance, we saw a significant change in activity. After giving birth to a healthy boy, with no heart problems, those faithful prayer warriors visited us before our son was even twenty-four hours old. Also, members of the church prepared nutritious meals and brought them to our home every other day for three weeks.

Throughout our son's early years, empathetic leaders and friends listened and shared godly advice in child rearing. When I miscarried our second child, our church friends poured out comfort and prayer. One couple gave us a gift certificate to eat out while they babysat our son. When our younger son was born, church friends again provided meals and extra hands as we adjusted to new patterns. We couldn't have survived becoming parents and assuming so much responsibility without the support of our church community. Now as our oldest son begins college, I feel great gratitude for all the love, training, and prayer, he received from godly teachers, youth leaders, and worship mentors. Our younger son continues to receive training, prayer, and friendship from the next generation of leaders. God has used many individuals and the Christian community as a whole to make a world of difference in the life of our family.

When we talk about "Christian community," we mean the following:

Christian community is people united by a common calling from God; a common salvation in union with Jesus Christ; a common experience of the indwelling, transforming, and empowering presence of the Holy Spirit; and a common mission to advance God's Kingdom. These people live out their lives together, mutually supporting each other in love and depending upon the Holy Spirit (Nathan and Crawford).

Pray that God's Spirit will impress on each person the vital necessity of living and participating in Christian community.

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

This is background information for leaders. You may decide how much of this to share with your group members.

The Apostle Paul wrote the letter to the Philippians around A.D. 62. We know that Paul was in prison, awaiting a judgment, because he referred to his imprisonment three times in the first chapter (1:7, 13–14, 17). Scholars are uncertain where he was imprisoned; he may have been in Ephesus or Caesarea. Paul indicated that he may be released, but he also recognized the real possibility of being put to death (1:20, 27; 2:17).

The city of Philippi bears the name of Phillip II, king of Macedonia, who founded it in 356 B.C. Luke describes the city as “...the leading city in the first district of Macedonia (Acts 16:12). Macedonia was a territory, which we might liken to “the Midwest,” and is part of modern Greece today. Paul was called by the Holy Spirit to preach the gospel there. This was not part of Paul’s original plan, but God intervened, preventing him from going to Asia and directing him and his companions to Macedonia (Acts 16: 6–10). Then they came to Philippi, a Roman colony. Finding a Jewish place of prayer, Paul began to teach the gospel. One of the first converts was a woman named Lydia (Acts 16:15). She put her house at the disposal of the missionaries and it became the meeting place of the church at Philippi.

While serving the Lord in Philippi, Paul ran into trouble when he exorcised a “spirit of divination” from a slave girl (Acts 16:16–18). The girl’s owners, who could no longer make money by her fortune telling, seized and falsely accused Paul and Silas. The owners created uproar in the city, which resulted in the missionaries being unlawfully beaten, arrested, and jailed (Acts 16:19–24). During this short imprisonment, when an earthquake occurred but none of the prisoners escaped, the Philippian jailer and his household converted to Christianity (Acts 16:25–34).

Paul wrote the letter to the Philippians when Epaphroditus, who had come from Philippi with a gift of financial support, visited the Apostle. Paul’s principal purpose was to encourage the Philippian believers to maintain love and unity with each other and to avoid the natural tendency to self-assertiveness. In essence, Paul was writing to encourage the Philippians to continue building and preserving Christian community.

STUDY THE PASSAGE: Philippians 2:1–18

1. Let’s read Philippians 2:1–4, 5–11, and 12–18. What does Paul remind the church members they have received (v. 1)?

Before looking at the specifics, explain to your group that the word *if*, repeated four times in verse 1, has the meaning of “since.” Paul is not questioning whether these conditions are true or not. He is stating what every Christian has received that can serve as a basis for healthy community (Moyter, p. 103).

First he mentions that being **united** by faith in an eternal relationship **with Christ** is a great source of **encouragement**. Encouragement is to put courage in someone so

that he or she can persevere when times are difficult. If this young church would reflect on the suffering that Jesus faced for His people, then they might find courage to endure hardship as well (Hebrews 12:2–3). Knowing that Jesus lives in them and will be with them (John 14:15–24), could help them face suffering (1:29–30), and live with the uncertain results of Paul’s imprisonment.

Paul then mentions **comfort** from **Christ’s love**. This young church was undergoing suffering (1:28, 20). Paul was writing from prison, so he faced great hardship, too. He wanted to remind the Philippians that the way Christ had loved them by laying down His life for sinners (Gaffin, p. 1805) was an unquestionable source of comfort for them. All who trusted in Jesus would not experience the wrath of God but rather the forgiveness, justification and reconciling love of God instead (Romans 3:21–26). Believing that He loves them this much could bring great comfort when circumstances were difficult and they might be tempted to think that God did not care about them. When Paul wrote the Corinthian church, he praised God for the divine comfort given in Christ to us so that we can pass it on to others (2 Corinthians 1:2–7). This is what Paul is doing with the Philippians, and in reminding them of God’s deep love, he may be exhorting them to show such comfort to each other.

Next, Paul reminds the Philippians they have **fellowship** with the very **Spirit** of God. *Fellowship* usually means a partnership or people participating in something together. Because all who believe in Jesus have the Spirit of God living in them, they are joined spiritually in a relationship with each other. This was a spiritual reality for the Philippians, not something they were commanded to make happen.

Lastly, Paul refers to **tenderness** and **compassion**. Although Paul does not state the source of these emotions, the New Testament describes Jesus as full of compassion and God the Father as “...the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort...” (2 Corinthians 1:3). God has gone far beyond what He needed to do legally to spare our lives from damnation. He forfeited the life of His beloved Son in order to rescue us from slavery to sin and death. He has mercifully forgiven, cleansed, and adopted us as His children provided we trust in His Son, Jesus Christ (Ephesians 1:3–7). He has made us co-heirs with His perfect Son, Jesus, and promised we will share His glory if we persevere by faith in this life (Romans. 8:15–17). Remarkably, God went to these lengths to save and reconcile us to Himself. The only explanation for such kindness is that it is His nature to do so. God’s name [which reveals His nature] is “the Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin...” (Exodus 34:5–7).

2. How does each of the truths in verse 1 help build a solid foundation for Christian community?

Union with Christ by faith in Him is the key to living as a Christian. At our conversion, we aren’t handed a new set of rules to obey. We are given a new life, the life of Jesus. As He lives in us and transforms us by the power of His Spirit, we begin to see others and ourselves differently, and we begin to respond to life’s trials differently. We have

His life not merely as a model for how to live in relation to God and others, but also we have His life empowering us to live humbly, unselfishly, and lovingly. Without His love, we will hinder the kind of community that God intends for us to enjoy and display to others. So our salvation is the primary **basis** for community.

As we grow beyond the point of conversion, we get **encouragement** from Jesus' willingness to suffer for us so that we have the courage to suffer as we spread His good news. If one person in our church suffers, we suffer as well because we are joined together in His Body, the church (1 Corinthians 12:26; 1 Corinthians 12:12–13; Romans 12:15). This is one aspect of what it means to have **fellowship** with one another or be united with each other by Christ's Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:13). If one person in the Body needs to be shown **tenderness** or **compassion**, we can share those because God the Father has been tender and compassionate towards us. So, having the life of Christ in us is also the **resource** for what we need to live in community.

Our unity comes from being linked with Christ by His Spirit's presence in each of us individually and corporately. Our ability to empathize or feel with each other comes from having Christ's unselfish and tender love for one another. As the church meets in small or large gatherings, we express these truths to the rest of the world. This is not an ideal we should aim for. This is a reality created by God that Christians are called to maintain, not destroy (Ephesians 4:3).

3. What could the Philippian church do that would give Paul great joy (v. 2)?

Paul's cup of joy would overflow if the community at Philippi were unified in their thoughts, emotions, and purpose (Bruce, p. 62). Paul describes this oneness in terms of sharing the **same mind** (NASB) or "being like-minded" (NIV and KJV); showing the **same love** (NASB; NIV; KJV) for each other (John 13:35); living **united in spirit** ("one in spirit" NIV; "in one accord" KJV), which we assume refers to the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 4:3); and having **one purpose**, which is the same Greek word for *like-minded*. Moyter translates *like-minded* as "think the same thing" and *one in...mind* as "thinking the one thing," indicating the close relationship between these (p. 105). We can see Paul's emphasis on the unity of the church by use of repetition.

To grasp how vital community is for all believers, we need to look at the big picture of what God is doing throughout the world, not just in our church or small group. Paul tells the Ephesians that God's will is to **unite** all things in heaven and on earth under one head, Jesus Christ (1:10). Our being reconciled to God and one another through Jesus, is part of the universal **unity** God wants to accomplish when Jesus returns. It is a restoration or recreation of the harmony and intimacy humans first enjoyed in the Garden of Eden before they rebelled against God's governance of their lives. Any resistance on our parts to be reconciled and united with other believers is opposition to the revealed will of God.

Of course, we are not stating that every Christian should be willing to expose himself or herself repeatedly to someone who claims to be a Christian but might harm them

emotionally or physically. Paul qualifies this with “If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone” (Romans 12:18). Moreover, we are called to carry this message of unity and reconciliation beyond the borders of our church to those who are still estranged from God. Paul tells the Corinthians that we are God’s ambassadors, His representatives appealing to others to be reconciled to God (2 Corinthians 5:18–20). Thus our church or small group is to be “...a foretaste of heaven...” (Icenogle, pp. 352–353)—a visible sign of the reconciled people of God that will spend a harmonious eternity with Him.

4. How does sharing a common outlook and purpose contribute to the building up of community?

When a Christian community is of one mind, heart, spirit, and purpose there will be a unity that transcends our human ability to agree and co-operate with each other. This should reveal the presence of Jesus Christ and His kingdom on earth (John 17:22–23), especially when those people are under pressure. Every Christian group should stand out from other social units because our mutual love is expressed so clearly. Paul tells the Philippians to “stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel...” (1:27b). He states that this will be a sign to Christians of the certainty of their salvation as well as a sign to their opponents that those apart from Christ will be destroyed (1:28). Our loving each other and serving together will be attractive to the outside world, and people will want to participate in the kind of relationships that we have. The Lord will use this witness to draw others to Himself and add to our number. New believers will strengthen or build up our community—both numerically and in terms of the gifts and talents they bring.

5. As we practice community, what are we to avoid (vv. 3–4)? How are these harmful to community?

Paul mentions **selfish ambition** (“selfishness” NASB; “strife” KJV) not only here but also in Chapter 1:17, where it is the motive of those who are preaching Christ in order to stir up more trouble for him (Gaffin, p. 1805). Paul also lists it among the “acts of the sinful nature” in Galatians 5:20 (Gaffin, p. 1805). Any promotion of self and one’s own agenda does not reflect the Spirit of Jesus, who came to serve others, not to be served (Mark 10:45). Therefore, we always need to repent of selfish ambition since we can’t serve Jesus and His purposes while serving ourselves at the same time.

Paul also says we should not be motivated by “**vain conceit**” (“empty conceit” NASB; “vainglory” KJV). *Vain* originally meant “empty” (Merriam–Webster.com) and here is linked with the word *conceited* “having an excessively high opinion of oneself” (Merriam–Webster.com). [Today, *vain* has actually become synonymous with *conceited*.] Paul does not want the congregation to be self-focused or proud since both would prevent them from honoring Jesus as “pre-eminent” or number one as the Head of the church (Colossians 1:18).

Any form of selfishness is deadly to community life. Both selfish ambition and empty conceit spring from the root sin of pride and are the opposite of humility. James and John approached Jesus with empty conceit and requested that they be placed at the head of the line in leadership in His kingdom (Mark 10:35–45). Jesus responded by telling them that His kingdom will consist of servants who will be marked by humility. Christian community is only built when the Holy Spirit inspires Christ’s servant attitude in believers who serve one another with Christ’s self-forgetting love.

6. How are we to view others in community (vv. 3–4)?

Paul instructs the Philippians to practice **humility** instead of selfishness. He tells them to “...consider others better than yourselves” (v. 3) and “...look to the interests of others” (v. 4). Paul wants them to see that while we may have legitimate needs, our needs should not always outweigh those of our brothers and sisters in Christ. In Christian community, the good of our brothers and sisters is to be just as important as our own, if not more so. Jesus said He came to serve and not to be served (Mark 10:45). How can we call ourselves His followers if we live just to please ourselves? Paul showed concern for other members of the body of Christ by telling the Roman Christians to avoid causing another Christian to sin even if it meant restricting a habit that he usually felt free to practice (Romans 14:13–21).

***When are you tempted to put your needs before another member of our church? How can we live in a way that balances our legitimate need with someone else’s?**

In Galatians 6:1–2, we are instructed to bear one another’s burdens and thus fulfill the law of Christ (cited in Bruce, p. 63). This is radically contrary to our culture, which is steeped in narcissism (the love of self). At the same time, Paul tells the Galatians “...each one should carry his own load” (6:5). Perhaps the difference between carrying burdens versus carrying a load has to do with the kind and degree of weight someone is shouldering. At times we may find situations increasingly difficult for us meet with triumphant faith, abundant energy, or adequate resources. By living in community rather than isolation, we can assist each other with those overwhelming burdens while at the same time encouraging each person to be responsible for his or her part. Bruce adds this reminder: “If Christ’s example is to be followed, then it is better to be concerned about other people’s rights and our own duties than about our own rights and other people’s duties” (p. 64).

7. Who or what does Paul tell us to imitate (v. 5)?

Once again Paul uses a word related to mind, translated **attitude** in the NIV and NASB. He refers to Jesus as Christ Jesus, indicating that He was both divine and human. Paul goes on to describe the self-sacrificial attitude evident when Jesus humbled Himself to die in our place. Paul wanted them to understand and process life with the mind of Christ, which we have been given (1 Corinthians 2:16).

8. How would you put verses 6–8 in your own words?

Verses 6–11 may have been an early Christian hymn since they are so poetic (Gaffin, p. 1805). Jesus Christ understood His eternal equality with God (John 1:1–2) but chose to renounce it, to empty Himself of every divine advantage or privilege, and to refrain from every hint of self-aggrandizement or self-assertion (Bruce, p. 69). Taking on human flesh and blood, He humbly served and obeyed His Father. Bruce reminds us that Jesus’ prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane the night of His arrest was “...not my will” (p. 71). Jesus chose the Father’s will when He died in our place as the perfect sacrifice for sin (Hebrews 9:23–28).

This Philippians 2 passage depicts how humble Jesus’ ‘heart’ or the core of His being is (Matthew 11:28–30). It also refers to the kind of death He endured—death on a cross, which was a torturous way the Romans executed criminals. For a Jew, dying on a tree was considered a curse, so Jesus was humiliated further this way (Galatians 3:13, cited by Gaffin, p. 1805).

9. What does it mean to “empty” or make yourself “nothing” (v. 7)?

It means to deny yourself — to deny yourself any reason to boast, to forego any self-serving goals or desires, to give up anything that would stand in the way of honoring Jesus and serving others. Jesus said that if anyone would come after Him, he or she must deny him/herself, take up his/her cross daily, and follow Him in self-denial (Matthew 16:24–26). Paul states this about himself when he says farewell to the elders of the church at Ephesus in Acts 20:22–24:

And now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there. I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me. However, I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the gospel of God’s grace.

***How easily does such humility come to you?**

10. What was the result of Jesus’ willingness to put God and others first (vv. 9–11)?

Not only was our salvation a result of Jesus’ substitutionary death (Romans 4:25), but also God the Father honored Him above everything else in all of creation. Exalting Jesus to the highest place reminds us of Christ’s ascension to the right hand of God (Mark 14:62; Acts 2:33; Hebrews 1:3, cited in Bruce, p. 72), referring to the place of honor in a throne room. The idea of giving Jesus a name above every other name is attributing Lordship to Jesus, giving Him the name *LORD* used by God for Himself in the Old Testament (Isaiah 42:8, cited by Bruce, pp. 72–73).

11. Why does Paul write, “work out your salvation,” when we believe that salvation is a gift from God (v. 12)?

Paul reminds the Philippians that they have always obeyed (v. 12a) which keys us in to the meaning of “work out your salvation.” Our salvation is more than our pardon, our being reconciled to God, and our rebirth. It is an ongoing process of being conformed to the image of Jesus (Romans 8:29). Gordon Fee states it this way:

The goal of individual conversion is for us to bear the fruit of the Spirit, that is to be transformed into God’s own likeness, the likeness of Jesus.... However we may wish it otherwise, when we receive the Spirit at conversion divine perfection does not set in, but divine “infection” does! We have been invaded by the living God himself, in the person of his Spirit, whose goal is to infect us thoroughly with God’s own likeness. Paul’s phrase for this infection is the fruit of the Spirit (p. 112).

Bruce reminds us that, “In this context Paul is not urging each member of the church to keep working at his or her personal salvation; he is thinking of the health and well-being of the church as a whole” (p. 81). Therefore, we need to read “work out your salvation,” we need to think of how a church as a unit can obey or submit to its Head and be more fully what Christ intends it to be. When Paul asks them to make the maturity of the Body of Christ a priority, he tells them to take it seriously, with proper awe or reverence, rendered by **fear** and **trembling** in the NIV (Bruce, p. 82).

12. What help do we have in making our salvation productive in our lives (v. 13)?

Our salvation and growth into the image of Jesus Christ is not simply something God does to us with a wave of His hand. Paul uses active words to talk about the total transformation that begins with salvation. He says to put off old ways of thinking and behaving; to be renewed in our thinking; and to put on new ways of behaving (Ephesians 4:22–24). “Life in the Spirit is not passive; nor is obedience automatic” (Fee, p. 133). “Working out” implies that we have a role to play, but Paul does not state we are left on our own to make radical changes by self-effort. He reassures the Philippians that “...it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.” We, both individually and corporately (Bruce, p. 82), co-labor with God’s Spirit by yielding to His guidance, resisting sinful desires and habits, and learning to be led by His godly promptings, which are in keeping with Scripture’s description of a holy life.

13. What can hinder our maturing together as a community (v. 14)?

Just like the self-centered focus or lack of humility Paul points out earlier, both **complaining** (“grumbling” NASB) and **arguing** with each other (“disputing” NASB) are mentioned as behaviors to avoid. James’ rhetorical question points to the selfishness in all humans the source of complaining and arguing: “What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don’t they come from your desires that battle within you?” (James 4:1). Ultimately, any complaining we do is a complaint against God who is

ruling over all people and circumstances we encounter in life. To complain to God about what He decides or permits is not uncommon. The Psalms are full of human complaints and expressions of unhappy emotions. But we need to recognize the impact public complaining or a habit of complaining can have on the Body of Christ.

Our words and wordless messages can either build up or tear down other's trust in God's goodness and faithfulness. If we are wrestling with a lot of negative feelings, we can voice those to God in private prayer, journaling, confession, etc. We may even need to find a trusted friend to reveal these to, or a godly mentor who can listen without judging us. There may be appropriate moments to confess them to our small group, if the group practices public confession, repentance, and forgiveness on a regular basis. But expressions of negativity need to be handled in such a way that we do not harm others' faith nor sow discontent in them as well. As a leader, you may want to evaluate whether this habit occurs often among members and how to caution against or correct this habit.

14. How can Christians in community be a bright light in contrast to this dark world (vv. 14–16a)?

By gathering on a regular basis around our Lord Jesus Christ to study His **Word**, worship and respond to Him, encourage and serve each other, and work together to spread His love beyond our group, we will experience His presence individually and corporately through His Spirit. Since God is light (1 John 1:5), and Jesus calls Himself “the light of the world” (John 8:12), we who belong to them should reflect their light. In Scripture, light is created by and associated with God. It may refer to His goodness, blessings, presence, purity, beauty, and dwelling place (Morris, pp. 134–136). Paul refers to the Philippian believers as **stars** that are shining in a dark universe (v. 15), and in Ephesians 5:8, he calls those Christians “children of light.” As we demonstrate trust in God [rather than complaining] and pursue His priorities [rather than arguing about our agendas], we provide an alternative to the selfish and destructive human patterns, which Paul refers to as “a crooked and depraved generation” in verse 15. Bruce notes that those words were used in the Old Testament to describe the rebellious, complaining Israelites who failed to trust and thank God as He led them through the wilderness towards the Promised Land (pp. 84–87).

Holding out or **holding on to the Word of life**, the two possible translations of this phrase, can mean that we share the gospel with our words while demonstrating the reality of it in our lives. It is both the content and the power of God's Word brought to us by His Son to reveal and bring about salvation and transformation (Moyter, pp. 133–134). If we can conduct ourselves as a Body of believers without grumbling and complaining, seeking to be pure and spotless like our Savior, then we make the gospel more attractive and understandable to those around us.

***When have you seen Christians in community impacting the people around them?**

Remember, you can skip some of the application questions or use them at the end of the study if you are short on time.

15. What does Paul consider worth spending his life on (vv. 16b–18)?

Paul is approaching the end of his life. He may be facing a death sentence. He doesn't want to appear before Christ on Judgment Day ashamed of how his disciples lived, so he urges them to continue obeying Christ whether he lives or dies. He describes his life as the final touch, the **drink offering**, on the **sacrifice and service** that the Philippians are giving to God as they obey and work out what it means to be a saved people (Moyter, pp. 134–135). The drink offering might be wine or olive oil poured over or beside a burnt offering with its grain offering (Bruce, p. 88). The burnt offering and the grain offering were both voluntary acts of worship ("Old Testament Sacrifices," p. 150), a fitting metaphor for the surrendered lives of Christ's followers who serve Him in gratitude for all He has done for us. Paul pictures the contribution he has made to their service to God as a minor part of all the commitment and effort they are exerting.

***What does your calendar or checkbook reflect you are spending your life on?**

APPLICATION

***How is building community more than a matter of establishing good friendships?**

***How is the Church's concept of community different from the world's?**

***What are some of the challenges of building and living in community?**

***How are you investing in community in our small group?**

***When have you seen our small group impacting the people around us? Is anything hindering our witness as a community? What could we do about that?**

WRAPPING IT UP

Community is built upon our salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. Christian community should demonstrate the biblical principles of humility and other-centeredness as modeled by the life of Jesus. The evidence of healthy community is a unity and oneness in love and purpose. The Christ-follower is not an island to himself. As we learned in our study on 1 John, Christian community exists because being joined to Christ also means we are joined to each other. Also, each of us is called to participate in Christian community as an act of obedience to God and a fulfillment of His mission. The culture we live in stands in opposition to true community by affirming the idea of rugged individualism. “Look out for number one,” “My business is my business”—these are the creeds of American individualism. For serious disciples of Jesus, community will not be an option, but will be embraced as the only road to spiritual maturity.

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