

# Week 2: Being Together

Ephesians 5:25-32 To be studied in response to January 20, 2019.

**life together**

A people apprenticed to  
the Life of Jesus

## Begin with Prayer

Gather in a comfortable setting. Ask the Holy Spirit to lead and guide your time together. Consider including a few minutes of silence.

## Introduction:

As always, *our common goal as apprentices of Jesus is to learn to be loved by Jesus, to be led by Jesus, to become like Jesus, to lead others to Jesus.* This study is part of a six-week series, "Life Together," focused on the essential practice of **Christ-centred community**. For us to open up to God and one another, let's remember to respect the following guidelines for a safe environment:

- Practice *good listening skills*
- Honour *"sharing boundaries"* and *confidentiality*
- Practice *healthy conflict resolution*
- Seek to be *co-learners* and make this a safe space to ask *any and all questions*.
- *Don't try to fix, problem-solve or rescue.* Our aim is to apply the truth of our identity in Christ and the completed work of his life, death, resurrection and reign to the circumstances of our lives.

## Re-connecting and Debriefing (10 minutes)

If you are in a community of seven or more, divide into small groups of 3-4 people each (ideally same-gender). Spend a few minutes catching up on life (e.g. highs and lows of past week). Discuss these debrief questions:

1. *Were you able to hear Sunday's teaching on Ephesians 5:25-32? What's one way God spoke to you?*
2. *What are some areas of your life where you resist the idea of commitment? Why do you think this is?*
3. *When have you experienced the rewards that come from committing (instead of "leaving options open").*

## Listening to God's Word: (20-25 minutes)

*Gather as a whole group, and read the following:* Whether it is food, entertainment, or a life partner, in a world dominated by seemingly infinite choices, it's a big temptation to "keep your options open." This amazing blessing soon leads to "choice anxiety," a fear of choosing wrong or closing doors forever. But certain things we will never understand or experience apart from commitment. Even a hesitancy to commit becomes a commitment. As apprentices of Jesus, then, it's worth asking: *Are there commitments we must make if we want to truly grow as apprentices?* Today's study and practice will deepen our understanding of Jesus' commitment to us, and help us understand the difference that it makes to commit ourselves to one another as well.

**Setting the Scene for Ephesians 5:25-32:** Paul's letter to the Ephesians describes the God's amazing plan to unite all things in Christ (1:10). Because of Christ, every heavenly blessing has been made available (ch 1), by faith, to Jews and Gentiles (ch 2). Through this beautiful, unified Body of Christ, Paul tells them, God is going to show off his "manifold wisdom... to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places" (3:10)! The Church is really important to Jesus, and central to His plan. This vision of the church informs Paul's understanding of covenant love in marriage. But our focus is to apply Paul's vision of Christ and the church back to our shared life together! As you listen to Paul's teaching here: **What do you relate to most in this teaching, and why?**

1. **Tell the Story:** Leader tells Ephesians 5:25-32 from memory.
2. **Rebuild the Story:** With Bibles open to Ephesians 5:25-32, verse by verse, identify...
  - *"Who, What, Where, When, How"? Where did the leader add or omit details?*
3. **Read the Story:** Read the story from the Bible.

#### 4. Debrief the Story: Respond to these questions:

- *What do you relate to in this teaching, and why?*
- *What do you observe about how Jesus expresses his covenant commitment to the church?*
- *According to Ephesians 4:15-16, Christ's commitment to take care of his Bride happens through the members of his Body. How can this shape our attitude toward a commitment to community?*

#### **Making Our Commitment** (10-15 minutes)

Today's practice is a prayer of commitment based on the "one anothers" that are found throughout the New Testament. Before you pray it together, the Leader may want to give the group a couple of minutes to read it over (together or individually) in a reflective way. You might give people an opportunity to ask questions or make comment about what they have read. When you pray it out loud together, pause after each phrase to let people ponder its meaning. After 20-30 seconds, the group can read the response together, and continue.

*Leader: Lord Jesus Christ, there is one body and one Spirit, and when we were called, it was to one hope – one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.*

**Group: As a community that is an expression of your Body, we desire to live lives worthy of this calling.**

*Leader: Father of mercy, you call us to accept, gently, patiently tolerate, be kind, tender-hearted, bear with and forgive one another. (Pause)*

**Group: Father, make us MERCIFUL.** (Rom 15:7, Eph 4:2, Eph 4:32, Col 3:13)

*Leader: Prince of Peace, you call us to be at peace, and to be of the same mind with one another. (Pause)*

**Group: Jesus, make us ONE.** (Mk 9:50, Rom 12:6, 15:5)

*Leader: Spirit of Grace, you call us not to grumble among, devour, or consume, complain against, judge or place a stumbling block for one another, but rather to seek good for one another. (Pause)*

**Group: Spirit, make us GRACIOUS.** (Jn 6:43, Gal 5:15, Ja 4:11, 5:9, Rom 14:3, 1 Th 5:15)

*Leader: Lord of Love, you have taught and modeled for us, and now call us to love one another, and in that love, to serve, pray for, be hospitable to, and be devoted to one another. (Pause)*

**Group: Jesus, pour out your LOVE through us.**

(Jn 13:34, 15:12, 17, Rom 13:8, 1 Th 3:12, 4:9, 1 Pt 1:22, 1 Jn 3:11, 4:7, 11, 2 Jn 5, Gal 5:13, Ja 5:16, 1 Pt 4:9, Rom 12:10)

*Leader: Humble Servant King, you have taught and modeled for us, and now call us to, in honour, give preference for, serve, be subject to, consider more important, and wash feet for one another, clothing ourselves with humility toward one another. (Pause)*

**Group: Good Shepherd, we abandon selfishness, and trust in your perfect care and protection for us.**

(Jn 13:14, Rom 12:10, Gal 5:13, Eph 5:21, Phil 2:3, 1 Pt 5:5)

*Leader: Spirit of Truth, you call us not to lie to one another, but to speak the truth in love, comfort, encourage, build up, teach, and stimulate one another toward love and good deeds. (Pause)*

**Group: Holy Spirit, together we submit to the TRUTH of Jesus and the WISDOM of community.**

(Eph 4:25, Col 3:9, 1 Th 4:18, 1 Th 5:11, Heb 10:24, Col 3:16)

*Leader: Bride of Christ, as the Spirit gives grace, let us commit again to the fellowship we share in Christ.*

**Group: We belong to Christ, and so we belong to one another. Thanks be to God.**

#### **Listening to One Another** (10 minutes)

After you have completed this prayer of commitment, regroup and discuss the following questions together:

- ❖ *How was it to give voice to a commitment to be in community together?*
- ❖ *Do you think there is a difference between Christian friends hanging out, and a shared life together in the Spirit?*
- ❖ *Out of all these "one anothers," which one(s) do you find most rewarding to practice? Most challenging?*

Then, using **the Lord's Prayer** (Matthew 6:9-13) as a guide, based on what you've shared together, spend time listening to God and praying for one another.

## Leader Notes

At first glance the connection of this passage on marriage with the role of commitment to community might seem like a bit of a stretch. It may be a challenge to keep the group from being drawn into a discussion about marriage, instead of reflecting on the specific theological insight that Paul provides about Christ and the church. As you lead the discussion and practice with the group, do your best to keep bringing the discussion back, if needed, to a church community application. *Jesus Christ, the Bridegroom, has made an unbreakable commitment to love and nurture his church. The means by which he lives out that commitment is by equipping the body to love one another in all kinds of ways. And so, being "in Christ," belonging to Christ, we are invited to embrace, and even voice to one another, the commitment he has already made to us.*

With regards to the practice, those who are less familiar with liturgical forms may struggle to engage at first. This is why it's important to give the opportunity to read it over and reflect on it before launching into the experience together. Here are a few thoughts you may want to explain to your group:

- Liturgical prayers based in Scripture have been used to provide and instruct believers in the faith, at every stage of their journey, for hundreds of years.
- As with "psalms, hymns and spiritual songs" (Colossians 3:16), speaking thoughtfully composed prayers with the language of Scripture unites God's people in their worship and petitions.
- In speaking out a prayer of commitment together, we recognize the power of words to create something that was not there before. Just as a marriage vow actually creates a new family, a spoken commitment to one another creates a genuine bond, the sealing of which we can look back upon when relationships hit a rocky point.

We hope that you will find this experience meaningful as a group. It would be entirely appropriate to include a time of sung worship, or to end this more scripted prayer with a release into a more "free-flowing" prayer time together.