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welcome
to 40 days of unity

Welcome to the 40 Days of Unity resource. God promises that “*my word that goes out from my mouth will not return empty*” (Isaiah 55:11). As you spend 40 days listening to God's word on church unity and city transformation, trust that promise. God intends to bless his church with unity and work through that unity for the benefit of cities and nations. Jesus prayed: “... *May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.*” (John 17:23).

The 40 Days of Church Unity and City Transformation have grown out of the church scene of Toowoomba, Queensland Australia. There the local Christian Leaders' Network, with leadership given by Ian Shelton, provides a loose framework for Christians to be one in Christ for the city. Pastors and leaders come together for prayer at least once a week. Churches commit to supporting prayer summits, citywide worship, the Australian Gospel Music Festival, conferences

and seminars, the mayor's prayer breakfast, chaplains in state schools, joint youth rallies, and so on.

In Toowoomba there is an understanding among numerous church leaders that all Christians of our city belong together and that only together we can impact the city. Our hope is that anyone doing the 40 Days of Unity campaign may come to share in that vision. God means to pour out his grace on cities and nations through a united church.

The 40 Days of Unity campaign may best be undertaken by a number of churches in the same town, city or suburb. Christians may learn together why they need to be what they are: one with each other. If a joint campaign with other churches is premature or not possible, then an individual congregation may study the 40 Days of Unity by itself to strengthen its resolve to engage the wider body of Christ. Even small groups or individuals may use the resource and then speak the word of unity into their context.

resources for 40 days of unity

The following resources are available:

- 1 Unity Handbook (for every participant) containing a campaign overview, 40 Bible devotions on church unity & city transformation and 6 small group study guides.
- 2 Unity DVD containing the six small group messages.
- 3 Unity Transcripts containing a campaign overview and the transcripts of the six video messages (also available for free on the internet: www.lca.org.au/pastors/edgarmayer).
- 4 Marketing Tools & Assistance:
 - Posters & Leaflets
 - Audio Visual Presentation
 - E-Blast News flash
 - Electronic Advertisement files

These resources may be ordered from

Christian Leaders' Network, c/o Toowoomba City Church,
PO Box 2216, Toowoomba, Qld 4350, Australia
Tel: 07 4638 2399, Fax: 07 4639 2691
Email: tcchurch@tcchurch.com.au

The campaign has four components:

- 1 Every day for 40 days people read a Bible devotion on church unity.
- 2 Once a week for six weeks people meet in small groups to study a video message on church unity & city transformation.

- 3 Seven Sunday morning worship services tie in with the small group studies and expand on church unity & city transformation.
- 4 At the beginning and end of the campaign all of the participating churches come together for combined citywide celebrations. In the middle of the campaign Christians from all participating churches support a joint week of prayer.

preparing for 40 days of unity

The campaign may be prepared in the following way:

- 1 Campaign facilitators may be appointed and oversee the running of the campaign.
- 2 For the duration of the campaign churches clear their calendars of all unnecessary distractions.
- 3 Four months before the campaign a prayer team from several churches forms and begins to intercede for God's purposes to unfold in the campaign.
- 4 Four months before the campaign church leaders begin to promote the campaign in their churches.
- 5 Four months before the campaign church leaders begin to plan for the combined church celebrations and week of prayer.
- 6 Four months before the campaign church leaders appoint small group teams which begin to meet and pray together. These teams are responsible for appointing the many small group hosts and help with launching the various small groups. The small groups can consist of members of the same congregation but it is worth the effort to establish small groups across congregational boundaries for the duration of the campaign.
- 7 Four months before the campaign church leaders appoint a communications team which builds momentum for the campaign by releasing advertisements, encouragements, reminders, ...
- 8 A commitment for reaping the benefits of the campaign may be given. After the 40 Days of Unity what will be the next step for the local church community?

outline for 40 days of unity

Possible Campaign Outline

Sunday Morning 1 : Preparing for the mid-week small group message "One People".

Sunday Evening Combined Church Celebration

Mid-Week Small Group Study 1 : One People.

Sunday Morning 2 : Preparing for the mid-week small group message "One Message".

Mid-Week Small Group Study 2 : One Message.

Sunday Morning 3 : Preparing for the mid-week small group message "One At The Cross".

Mid-Week Small Group Study 3 : One At The Cross.

Sunday Morning 4 : Preparing for the mid-week small group message "One Through Prayer".

Mid-Week Small Group Study 4 : One Through Prayer.

Sunday Morning 5 : Preparing for the mid-week small group message "One In Repentance".

Mid-Week Small Group Study 5 : One In Repentance.

Combined Week Of Prayer

Sunday Morning 6 : Preparing for the mid-week small group message "One For Our City".

Mid-Week Small Group Study 6 : One For Our City.

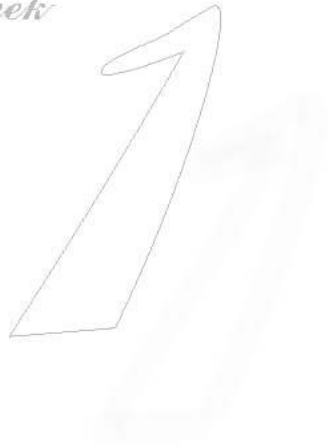
Sunday Morning 7 : Celebrating what has been learned and done. Looking forward to united outreach.

Sunday Evening Combined Church Celebration

one people



Week



Notes

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DAY 1

we belong
to each other...

... because we have the same Father from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name. *Ephesians 3:14-15*: "For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name." [Read Ephesians 3:14-21.]

People are not isolated islands. We have a father and a mother and somehow belong to them and others in our family, clan and nation. At our birth we are named and begin to share in the name of our family. We are born into the history and fortune of our ancestors. Sometimes people want to escape from the legacy of their parents so that they can make a name for themselves. However, what has been forged by birth cannot be so easily undone. We bear the name of our family and often that can be good. Has anyone ever shown kindness to you because of what one of your family has done to them?

God agrees that people are not isolated islands. He himself placed us in families and made us bear their names. However, when families begin to squabble (among themselves and with others) and – in an extended sense – when church families begin to squabble with each other, when Christians tear apart into hostile denominations, then God steps in and corrects our vision.

We have a common Father who made us all and made us first and foremost bear his name. As different as you and I may be we are all family belonging to our common Father in heaven. The apostle Paul writes: "*For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name*" (Ephesians 3:14-15).

There is a stronger bond between us than we may have expected. We share in the name of God and therefore share in the same privileges. We are family. Take in what the apostle Paul continues to write: " ... according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened ... with power through his Spirit ... Christ may dwell in your hearts ... rooted and grounded in love ... together with all the saints ... know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge ... filled with all the fullness of God ... able to do immeasurably more than all we can ask or imagine ..." (Ephesians 3:16-21).

The person that we may dislike shares in the abundance of God. Let us not mess with the family of God. We belong to each other because we are one in the Father from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name.

DAY 2

we belong
to each other...

... because those who believe are all the children of Abraham and blessed through him. *Galatians 3:7-9*: "Understand, then, that those who believe are children of Abraham. The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: 'All nations will be blessed through you.' So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith." [Read Galatians 3:1-14.]

"You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? ..." (Galatians 3:1). Paul used strong words to make Christians rethink the core of their faith. He hammered the point that none of us earns or achieves the privileges of God by human effort. Today that may sound obvious but how often do we fall into the same trap of foolishness? We judge each other by how much we seem to do in the service of God. We judge that people or entire denominations do not enjoy more gifts of God because there is not enough maturity or praise or giving or learning. Is that not adding works to faith? As much as God resists willful disobedience, we must be careful.

The apostle Paul continued to write: *"I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by observing ... or by believing ... ? ... Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort? ... Does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you because you observe the law, or because you believe what you heard"* (Galatians 3:2-5). What we receive from God is unmerited. There is no room for human credit taking or competition.

Right from the beginning God chose to make us all children of the same promise. The apostle Paul spelled it out thus: *"Consider Abraham: 'He believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.' Understand, then, that those who believe are children of Abraham. The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: 'All nations will be blessed through you.' So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the person of faith"* (Galatians 3:6-9).

Can we give up the foolishness of concentrating on us and our works – even our works for God? Can we give up demanding from each other more than faith? God justified Abraham by faith and determined to justify us also by faith. In this sense we are Abraham's children and belong together. Can we encourage each other by saying no more than "believe and belong"?



... because we are all children of God through faith in Jesus Christ. *Galatians 3:26: "You are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus."* [Read Romans 1:8-17.]

Faith in Jesus saves us and makes us family. God says in the Bible: *"You are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus"* (Galatians 3:26). However, there is more. Christians are a family that is far-flung and forever on the move in the service of God. That is why it is of great encouragement to meet other family members and recognize in them the faith that is of God and makes us one.

Students in a Chinese school were on the look-out for fellow Christians and they did so by observing who would bow their heads in prayer at meal-times. What joy it was to them when they found each other. What joy it was to them when common faith in Jesus strengthened them. In the same way the apostle Paul wrote to the distant congregation of imperial Rome: *"First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is being reported all over the world ... I long to see you ... that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith"* (Romans 1:8-12).

Do we long to see the other Christians in our city? Do we thank God for the reports which we hear from each other? The majority of our community may not believe in Jesus and at times the

press, the government, schools and neighbours, business and sports clubs are indifferent, if not hostile, toward the Christian faith. How good it is then to be encouraged by each other's faith. There is hope. God is powerful in many lives.

Why not adopt this attitude? We long to see each other for mutual encouragement. By the grace of God we belong to each other because we are all children of God through faith in Jesus Christ.

DAY 4

we belong to each other...

... because through Christ we all have access to the Father by one Spirit. Ephesians 2:18: "For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit." [Read Ephesians 2:11-22.]

Pin numbers grant access to bank accounts, security doors and lots of other prized places. Therefore, pin numbers are stored in safe places and kept secret. Random combinations of numbers and letters become powerful gaining access to valued possessions.

The question is whether God also uses pin numbers. How do we gain access to him who is even more valuable than bank accounts and all other human goods? As strange as it may sound sometimes we do act as if God handed out "pins" to a select few. We punch in the right set of doctrines or the right formula of worship attitudes and God somehow must open up to us granting us his favours. There is almost a programmed response. We also believe that the right "pin" is crucial and in our view many others get at least one digit wrong. Is that not true?

However, God is better than a machine whose access can be controlled by a pin. God knows that we tend to lose pin numbers or type in the wrong code or keep them secret when they are to be shared. God found a better way of giving us access to him. The Bible says: "*For through Jesus Christ we both have access to the Father by one Spirit*" (Ephesians 2:18).

God became his own pin number and therefore no code can separate Christians. God, the Son Jesus Christ, died on a cross so that his sacrifice would be the lasting code which would grant access to God, the Father. What is more: God, the Holy Spirit, keeps hammering the point that God is more than a magic number to us. God is a person and access to him is personal. The person Jesus opened the way to the person of the Father and the one person of the Holy Spirit makes sure that we all get there. There is nothing mechanical and nothing that can be manipulated.

Can we stop treating certain doctrines and practices as the "pin numbers" which grant admission to God? Can we let go of control? We belong to each other because through Christ we all have access to the Father by one Spirit.

DAY 5

we belong to each other...

... because all us who have been baptized into Christ have clothed themselves with Christ and therefore are one in Christ. Galatians 3:27-28: "For all of you who were baptized into Christ

have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." [Read Galatians 3:27-29.]

A friend of mine was working in a bank sporting long hair and casual clothes. He was never promoted until one day he cut his hair and began to wear suits. People judge each other by their clothes and appearance. An expensive outfit guarantees better service at hotels and restaurants. We talk about power-dressing or being underdressed. A woman in her forties described her experience when she went to hospital for a serious operation: "From one day to the next you lose everything. No matter who you are, in hospital they take away your jewelry, your clothes and lay you on a trolley with nothing but a flimsy hospital gown. Then you realize how it feels to be stripped of everything."

Christians are also clothes-conscious and their clothes bestow a dignity that can never be lost. The Bible says: "*For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ ...*" (Galatians 3:27-28). Have we ever thought about that? Jesus Christ himself is what we wear. When we were baptized, the water of our baptism washed away our sin and separation from God. We became new people and received new clothes. From the day of our baptism onwards the fabric of Jesus' perfect holiness covers our sin. How wonderful! Being clothed with Jesus Christ is more precious than royal robes.

What does that mean? Next time we size each other up by the clothes we are wearing, take another look. Look beyond shirts and suits. There is nothing between us. We are wearing the same because we are being clothed by the same Christ who makes us all one. The Bible makes the point that when people have clothed themselves with Christ: "*There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus*" (Galatians 3:27-28).

Rejoice in your outfit. Rejoice that none of us will ever be over-dressed or underdressed. No matter what suburb we live in or what social class we belong to we are all wearing the best. We belong to each other because all us who have been baptized into Christ have clothed themselves with Christ and therefore are one in Christ.



... because all of us who have been baptized have been united with Jesus in his death and will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. Romans 6:3-5: " ... We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life ... we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection." [Read Romans 6:3-14.]

In the trenches of war soldiers bond with each other. As death beckons and life becomes precious people appreciate, cling to, support and become thankful for each other. Why should that not be the same with Christians?

All of us have faced death – the death of our old sinful self. God says in the Bible that "*we were buried with Jesus through baptism into death ...*" (Romans 6:3-5). At our baptism the old sinful self was crucified with Jesus on the cross. All of us have faced that kind of death which makes us bond first of all with Jesus Christ but then also with each other.

The Bible says: “ ... don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection” (Romans 6:3-5). What an intense experience we share! We not only faced death with Jesus but survived with him. As he was raised from the dead, we will also be alive in God – now and forever. This is the promise of God.

Having faced the same death with Jesus we Christians bond with each other. Having survived together we live a new life. Ponder the outcome: “ ... consider yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body ... sin shall not be your master ... “ (Romans 6:11-14). Together we have become free to “offer ourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; . offer the parts of our body to him as instruments of righteousness ... “ (Romans 6:13).

Christians have been lying in the same trenches. We belong to each other because all who have been baptized have been united with Jesus in his death and will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection.

DAY 7

we belong to each other...

... because we, who are many, partake of the same Jesus Christ in the meal of Holy Communion. 1 Corinthians 10:16-17: "Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf." [Read 1 Corinthians 10:14-17.]

Sharing a meal builds community. It is no small matter to be invited into a home. Someone takes the time to prepare a meal and set the table. Someone cares enough to be with us and love us. Food and drink relax and satisfy us.

Jesus knew the importance of meals for fellowship. His enemies called him a glutton and drunkard precisely because he wined and dined so much. Jesus shared food many times with those that others would never invite into their homes. Jesus loved sinners and the kindness shown around the table often softened people's hearts and led them back to God.

What we Christians can be sure of today is that the meal-sharing Jesus is still among us. He offers himself to us all in the bread and wine of Holy Communion. The Bible says: "*Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf*" (1 Corinthians 10:16-17).

God gives us the most satisfying food. However, we Christians often share the meal of Jesus, participate in the kindness of his saving death for us all and then break up the table fellowship because of personal differences and schisms. What an offence to our host! Jesus is one. His body offered in the one loaf of Holy Communion is one. The food of forgiveness is one. Therefore we are one. We have to understand that Jesus intends to bring the different factions of a divided church around the one table of his presence.

Can we not accept that and let the meal of Jesus do its work? Bread and wine relax us in the company of God and each other. The kindness of Jesus softens our hearts and leads us back to him. We go back to the basics of being nourished by the grace of God. Next time we meet around the Lord's table, let us eat and drink together and as we do so, forgive and love one another. We belong to each other because we, who are many, partake of the same Jesus Christ in the meal of Holy Communion.

STUDY 1 one people overview

Warm-Up

- 1 Where do you feel more comfortable – in a big cathedral with a magnificent pipe-organ or in a modern auditorium with band and data-projector? Why?
- 2 When you visited a worship service at another church, how did you feel? Why?

Snippets From The Message:

“ ... Watchman Nee: ‘A local church is a church which comprises all the children of God in a given locality’ ... Church unity is not optional because before we do or say, think or feel anything God already made us one in Christ ... Disunity makes the fullness of Christ disintegrate in our midst and robs the church of its God-given power. We simply cannot afford to deny the design of God. We need to be what we are: together the body of Christ, the fullness of Christ in the one church ... Doctrinal disputes deteriorate very quickly into proud contests. But now God tells us that there is no knowledge of him without love ... “

Notes:

STUDY 1 one people let's talk... what now?

Let's Talk About It

- 1 Feel free to voice your first impressions in response to the video message. Then tackle some of the following questions.

- 2 Why are all Christians one people together belonging to the one universal church? You may look up one or more of the following Bible passages: Galatians 3:27-28; 1 Corinthians 10:16-17; Romans 12:5; 1 Corinthians 12:13,24-26.
- 3 Why then do we have about 33,800 different denominations and church groupings?
- 4 Do you think that a divided church pleases God? Do you think that a divided church may even obstruct God's intended blessings for our cities and nations? Why? You may look up one or more of the following Bible passages: 1 Corinthians 12:24-26; Ephesians 1:22-23; 4:15-16; Matthew 18:19-20.
- 5 Why can Christians be one even though they may have different points of view in some of their teachings? Who safeguards the truth of God? You may look up one or more of the following Bible passages: John 14:16-17; 15:26; 16:13.
- 6 Why is love the key to the knowledge of God and what has that to do with church unity? Please look up one or more of the following Bible passages: Colossians 2:2-5; 1 John 4:7-8; John 17:23; 13:34-35.

What Now

- 1 If all Christians are one people together belonging to the one universal church, how may you express that in your city and nation?
- 2 How can you respond to God's desire for unity to receive the blessings of unity?

one message



Week



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... **because together as the church we become one flesh with Jesus Christ.** *Ephesians 5:31-32: "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.' This is a profound mystery but I am talking about Christ and the church."* [Read Ephesians 5:22-33.]

The Bible says: " ... *love is as strong as death ... It burns like a blazing fire, like a mighty flame. Many waters cannot quench love; rivers cannot wash it away. If one were to give all the wealth of his house for love, it would be utterly scorned* " (Song of Songs 8:6-7). Love is as strong as death. It burns like a blazing fire and therefore by the design of God, when man and woman come together in marriage, love makes them "*become one flesh* " (Genesis 2:24). Man and woman are no longer two but one.

A missionary couple married rather late in life but were deeply in love with each other. The husband at the breakfast table was telling guests of a dream which he had the night before. His wife broke in: "Why, Frank, did you dream that dream or did I?" This is what can happen when husband and wife are no longer two but one. You identify with the other so much that you are no longer sure which is which.

God affirms that this is a mystery and then suggests that the same kind of mystery exists between the church and Jesus: "*For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.' This is a profound mystery – but I am talking about Christ and the church*" (Ephesians 5:31-32). Christ and the church more than match the union between husband and wife. Christ and the church also become "*one flesh*" which is a profound mystery.

We are the church. Do you know what that means? We are bonded together by marriage or some kind of relationship like that. As the church we become "*one flesh*" with Jesus and with Jesus "*love is as strong as death ... it burns like a blazing fire, like a mighty flame. Many waters cannot quench love ...*"

This is a mystery and we may not completely understand it. However, can we see each other in a new light? We belong to each other because together as the church we become one flesh with Jesus Christ.

... **because Christ is not divided.** *1 Corinthians 1:13: " ... One of you says, 'I follow Paul'; another, 'I follow Apollos'; another, 'I follow Cephas'; still another, 'I follow Christ.' Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized into the name of Paul? ... "* [Read 1 Corinthians 1:10-17.]

Church people in ancient Corinth divided over leadership issues. The apostle Paul wrote to them: “ ... One of you says, ‘I follow Paul’; another, ‘I follow Apollos’; another, ‘I follow Cephas’; still another, ‘I follow Christ.’ Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized into the name of Paul” (1 Corinthians 1:12-13)?

Sometimes we think that our champions of the faith are a cut above the rest. We are proud of them, swear allegiance to them and admonish everyone else to pay attention to them as well. We invoke their authority to the extent that in our own minds arguments are often settled by simply declaring: “Luther said ... “ or “Calvin said ... “ or “Wigglesworth said ... “ or “Bonke said ... “ or “Finney said ... “ or even “my local pastor said ... “ and so on.

This is wrong and not even the Corinthians were permitted to do so even though their champions of the faith would outshine ours. These early Christians could choose from leaders that were eye-witnesses of Jesus’ resurrection. There was Peter whom Jesus himself declared to be the “rock” on which he would build the church and there was Paul who became the apostle to the non-Jews. Nevertheless, any allegiance to humans was judged to diminish our allegiance to Jesus Christ.

Challenging questions confronted the Corinthians and confront us even today: “You seem to divide along party lines following different servants of Christ. Does that mean then that Christ is divided? Was Calvin crucified for you that you follow him? Was Wigglesworth? Were you baptized in the name of Luther that you use him to quarrel with others?”

Christ is not divided and therefore all leaders have their place as his servants in a united church: “*What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants ... as the Lord has assigned to each his task*” (1 Corinthians 3:5). All leaders are given for the benefit of the church: “ ... *All things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas ...* “ (1 Corinthians 3:21-22).

Sometimes it is easier to follow human champions than Christ. We can glory in their achievements, console ourselves with their flaws, manipulate and exert control through various means, own their collected works, and so on. This is not as demanding as living under the absolute lordship of Jesus Christ. However, it was Christ who was crucified for us and we were baptized in his name. We belong to him and not to human champions. Thus, no party politics must prise Christians away from each other. The same Christ is our Lord and he is not divided.



... because we are the body of Christ and the fullness of him dwells within us – the one church. *Ephesians 1:22-23: "And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way." / Colossians 2:10: "And you have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority."* [Read Ephesians 1:15-23.]

The fullness of Christ dwells in the church which is his body. That is what the Bible says: “*And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way*” (Ephesians 1:22-23). The question is whether we deflate the fullness of Christ, if we decide to tear apart and separate from

each other. If the fullness of Christ dwells in a united church body, what happens to that fullness in a fragmented church body?

Jesus said: *“Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them”* (Matthew 18:19-20). Divine power gathers momentum in a united church as Christians with one accord align themselves with the will of God. We cannot escape the logic of God. As the unity of two or three is blessed by the powerful presence of Christ, any disunity among Christians diminishes Christ's power – the fullness of him.

This is tragic because God means to give us everything in Christ. Read the words of the Bible again: *“And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church ...”* (Ephesians 1:22-23). All things are placed under the feet of Christ for the church which means for us. As we are the *“body of Christ, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way”* (Ephesians 1:23) God somehow wants to rule through us. God's *“intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms”* (Ephesians 3:10). Our desire then is that nothing may fragment or diminish what God has intended for us.

We repossess the fullness of Christ in our midst and let go of separate identities. We establish positively that all things must yield to the fullness of Christ in the one church which is his body. Be excited about the prospects. Cities and nations will belong to God through the one church. Can we imagine the kind of future which is planned and possible through the fullness of Christ? Jesus asked us to disciple nations and he will start where we live. Oh yes! We belong to each other because we are the body of Christ and the fullness of him dwells within us – the one church.



... because Jesus is praying that we may be brought to complete unity. *John 17:23: “ ... May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.”* [Read John 17:20-23.]

Jesus prayed that Christians *“may be brought to complete unity”* (John 17:23) and we all agree that one day we will enjoy *“complete unity”* in heaven. We all laugh at the joke where Jesus shows around newcomers in heaven and then they see an isolated group praising God in separation. The punch-line is: *“Please don't disturb them. They think that they are the only ones up here.”* We laugh at that because it is funny and yet close to home. We recognize that the attitude of the isolated group is not so far from the truth of our own traditions. However, none of us thinks like this any more.

Of course we will be united in heaven. However, what is possible right now? What about the complete unity among all Christians in the now of our existence on earth? A typical church response to this question is to form a committee. Let learned pastors and leaders of different churches sweat it out in workshops, seminars, plenum discussions, compendiums, academic reviews, synodical resolutions, and so on. Let them labour and lay the foundation for complete unity in our teaching and practice.

How helpful is all of that? Generations of church leaders have spent entire lifetimes on this quest with the end-result that in our day and time we have not more unity but more disagreements. When new people become inducted into these committees, they often have to learn their church's position first before defending that same position against all the others. The truth of God is no trifling matter and the comments here are not meant to be cynical but there has to be a better way.

Jesus was serious when he prayed about our complete unity. He was serious when he prayed to God the Father that *"they may be one as we are one"* (John 17:11). Jesus knew that our unity has to become an earthly reality *"to let the world know"* (John 17:23) about salvation. We have no other option than becoming one in complete unity. There is no other way of letting the world know about Christ. Could it be that our unity has more to do with love than knowledge?

God grant that we do not undermine our witness. Already here on earth we belong to each other.



... because we submit to the same Lord who is the head of the church. Colossians 1:15-20: "Jesus Christ is before all things and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church; ... so that in everything he might have supremacy ..." [Read Colossians 1:15-20.]

The Bible reading tells us that the church, the body of Christ, has one head, the Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, as members of Christ's body we need to submit to his headship and also remain connected to each other. As members of one body we need to work out the implications of our connectedness in our own geographical area. (There is a host of *"one another"* New Testament verses to tell us what these implications are.)

The only alternative to a body functioning cohesively under one head is fragmentation and disunity which is surely one – if not the most – grievous sin in the church. While I was sharing on church unity with a group of leaders in another country some years ago, one lady burst forth with this fresh insight: "Now I understand. If the body doesn't come together, the head has nowhere to sit!" A simple but profound statement!

It is easy for us to say or sing "Jesus is Lord" or "He is head of the church". It is quite another thing to make him our head and to make corporate and enduring commitments to work out all the implications.

Deuteronomy chapter 33 records the blessing which Moses gave to Israel just prior to his death. In verse 4 we read that *"the Lord became king in Israel when the leaders of the people assembled, when the tribes of Israel gathered"* (NLT). The word *"when"* needs underscoring and we can relate this to the church of today. While we know from the closing words of Matthew's gospel that Jesus has all authority in heaven and on earth, his lordship or headship functions more fully and effectively only *"when"* we come together as one. That is: *"when"* we prefer, serve, love, and submit to one another, together hearing and obeying our risen Lord. The passion of Jesus was – and remains – *"Father, make them one ..."* "When we are one, he will be Lord indeed!" [Written by Colin Shaw.]

... because in worship we are one with each other as we are one with the angels and arch-angels and all the company of heaven. *Revelation 5:11-14:* " ... the voice of many angels ... In a loud voice they sang: Worthy is the Lamb ... Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, singing: To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power for ever and ever ..." [Read Revelations 5:11-14.]

Worship unites Christians like no other activity. In a stunning vision of global and cosmic unity the Bible passage of Revelation 5:13 declares: " ... I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, singing: 'To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honour and glory and power for ever and ever.' ... " Christians worship the same God. As they are singing their praises to him they become part of the cosmic worship choir which includes countless peoples past and present and even angels. In worship there is even unity with the animals which likewise belong to "every creature in heaven and on earth ... "

The church has always known this and therefore an ancient worship order has the pastor pray first: "Therefore with angels and arch-angels and with all the company of heaven we adore and magnify your glorious name, evermore praising you and saying ... " Then the entire congregation joins in with the words which – according to Isaiah 6:3 – the angels sing at the throne of God: "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of hosts; heaven and earth are full of your glory ... " Thus, Christians have always known that we do not worship alone but that in worship we are in the company of all creatures, angels and arch-angels.

Now can we bring to the foreground what we have always known? Is it possible that we regain the perspective of our unity in worship which transcends any self-imposed or geographical isolation? Is it possible that once again we begin to see in our mind's eye the bigger picture of the cosmic choir? This can really lift us up. Should we find ourselves with only a few people at worship and the singing is laboured, we can nevertheless rejoice. We are part of something cosmic and are joined together with the most awesome worship group featuring amazing voices and fantastic displays of adoration.

Sometimes worship styles seem to divide us but that is actually not true. In its deepest sense worship can never divide us because in worship we are always one with each other as we are one with the angels and arch-angels and all the company of heaven. Enjoy the choir. Become aware that we sing to the same God using the same words: "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honour and glory and power for ever and ever."

... because unity brings praise to God. Romans 15:5-13: “ ... Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God ...” [Read Romans 15:5-13.]

A swimmer went to the Olympics, won two gold medals and then returned to her home country. When she came back to her own town, she wondered whether anyone would come out to greet her. She had not been a great celebrity or an outgoing personality. However, she was in for a surprise. More than 80,000 people lined the streets which was almost everybody. With one voice they applauded her and cheered her on. That made her day for years to come. The whole town was unified in praise and the people's unity in praise magnified the glory and acclaim of the Olympian.

God looks for the same and we want the same for God. The Bible says: “*May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God*” (Romans 15:5-7).

There is no reason why this cannot happen in our home towns. Drawing from the opening story can we picture the scenes of the parade? God brings home more than two gold medals. According to the Bible reading there is “*endurance*” and “*encouragement*” and also a “*spirit of unity*”. God himself makes us line the streets in glory of him. Bonded by the Spirit we applaud him together and cheer him on. With one heart and mouth we sing his praises and the bigger our chorus becomes the more praise he receives. Do we have a heart for praising God? Then let us accept one another because our unity brings praise to God.

STUDY 2 **one message** overview

Warm-Up

- 1 How do you feel when someone is very opinionated? Why?
- 2 When you come to a new place, how do you recognize other Christians? What is the common bond?

Snippets From The Message:

“ ... The early Christians were like us: at each other's throat over many issues. However, most of the time the admonition was ... Romans 14:13: ‘Let us stop passing judgement on one another ...’ ... Only once Paul drew a line in the sand ... Galatians 1:6-9: ‘...If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned.’ ... The apostle Paul ... explained what he meant – Galatians 2:21–3:2: ‘I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing ... Did you receive the Holy Spirit by observing the law or by believing what you have heard?’ ... Brothers and sisters in Christ, we may disagree on many issues but not on this one ... Let's unpack this further with a number of theses ...

... Thesis 1: God speaks to people either Law or Gospel. These two ways of divine speaking need to be distinguished but belong together and work together dynamically. Thesis 2: The Law always ends up accusing us. Thesis 3: The Law is preached first to accuse of sin, then the Gospel absolves and comforts. Thesis 4: The Law is not preached to those that are already terrorized by the Law. They need to hear the Gospel. Thesis 5: The Gospel is not preached to those that are no longer bothered by their sins. They need to hear the Law. Thesis 6: The Law does not produce good works. Thesis 7: The Gospel produces good works. Thesis 8: The Gospel produces good works and makes us wage 'war' against our old sinful self. Thesis 9: One and the same Word can function either as Law or Gospel. Thesis 10: The most difficult and highest Christian art is to master the dynamic of Law and Gospel, to distinguish these two ways of divine speaking, and to know when to speak either Law or Gospel. Thesis 11: Good Theology: Make God the doer of the sentence. God does for us and to us."

Notes:

STUDY 2 **one message**
let's talk... what now?

Let's Talk About It

- 1 Feel free to voice your first impressions in response to the video message. Then tackle some of the following questions.
- 2 How does it make you feel when people judge each other in your community? Why are words of judgement so often unproductive in making community life better?
- 3 What is the apostle Paul saying in the following Bible passages? Galatians 2:21–3:2: "I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing ... Did you receive the Holy Spirit by observing the law or by believing what you have heard?" Galatians 3:3: " ... After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?"
- 4 Why would the apostle Paul speak against human effort in earning our salvation from God? Why does human effort always lead to failure compared to the holiness of God?
- 5 How does God encourage us to deal with sin and failure? How does God motivate a holy life? Ephesians 3:14-21: " ... Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And ... you being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge – that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, *according to his power that is at work within us*, to him be glory ... “

- 6 Why can we not compromise with anyone when the message of grace (undeserved love from God) is at stake? What would we lose, if we did?

What Now

- 1 If all Christians agree on the message of salvation, how can we make this work for a stronger witness to our community?
- 2 If we agree on the core message of our faith, how can we judge each other less?

one at the cross



Week

A large, stylized outline of the number 3, suitable for coloring or tracing. The number is written in a decorative, cursive-like font with a large loop at the top and a smaller loop at the bottom.

Notes

A series of ten horizontal dotted lines for writing notes.

DAY 15

we belong
to each other...

... **because we have received the same commission from Jesus Christ.** *Matthew 28:18-20:* " ... *Go and make disciples of all nations ...*" [Read Matthew 28:16-20.]

When Hitler ruled in Germany, different government departments would be given the same commission which meant that the different department heads would be set up to compete against each other for the favours of the supreme leader. Enough movies and newspaper reports make the same point about the CIA (Central Intelligence Agency) and FBI (Federal Bureau of Investigation) organizations in the United States. They compete against each other, are loath to share intelligence and try to dominate the charter of information gathering.

When Jesus gave all Christians the commission to "*go and make disciples of all nations*" (Matthew 28:18-20), he did not expect Christians to compete against each other. On the contrary, he gave all Christians the same commission because we need each other to accomplish the task. Which congregation can convert an entire city on her own? Which church affiliation can convert an entire nation on its own? What hope do isolated Christians have of impacting the culture of a nation?

Sometimes Christians act as if they were in competition with each other and – to be fair – enough evidence seems to support that conclusion. Many a time church members are won or lost depending on the competitive edge of the particular congregation. Do we have a better music ministry than the neighbouring churches? Better preaching? Better pastoral care? Better variety?

God grant that we learn not to compete for those that are already Christians. Jesus did not commission us to build individual church empires by drawing and attracting as many Christians as possible to the same church centre. The commission is to disciple nations and we need each other – all Christian outposts – to fulfill that commission. How can we build each other up? How can we become partners in our city? We belong together because we have received the same commission from Christ.

DAY 16

we belong
to each other...

... **because unity lets the world know that the Father in heaven sent Jesus Christ and has loved us.** *John 13:34-35:* " ... *A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.*" / *John 17:23:* " ... *May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.*" [Read John 17:20-23.]

When a pastor looked at some photographs of his father, he became aware of how much they were alike. Sometimes people would make the family connection between them as soon as he mentioned his name and on occasion even before. Moreover, his wife assured him that there were also shared personality traits which were either inherited or picked up on the way.

Family resemblances are intriguing and may give us a sense of belonging. They also project to others what this family is about. The question is whether Christians also have a family resemblance which points to their common Father in heaven. It cannot be our appearance because we do not look the same but Jesus prayed: "... *May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me*" (John 17:23) and Jesus also said: "... *'A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another'*" (John 13:34-35).

Loving one another in complete unity is the shared family resemblance of all Christians. To this end Jesus prayed and to this end he first loved us. When Christians are true to themselves, they project this family trait and thus project to other people what kind of Father in heaven they have. Christians may still not look the same but after a while there is something alike in their bearing and character. You may see it in their faces that the love of God works itself out in their lives.

Consider the following story. It happened that a car sped across the median strip of the highway into southbound traffic, then back into northbound lanes. At least three people reported seeing a woman throw her infant son through the driver's side window. When questioned by the police, the mother said: "I would rather see my child dead than in this world."

It seems obvious that this mother needed hope. She and her own family were not enough to overcome the godless despair of this world. She needed to come in touch with God's own family here on earth. In other words, she needed to meet you and me. Let us get a new sense of why Jesus prayed: "... *May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know ...* " We belong to each other because loving one another in complete unity lets all people know about their God and gives them hope.



... because unity attracts others. *Acts 2:42-47: "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship ... All the believers were together and had everything in common ... And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved."* [Read Acts 2:42-47.]

A newspaper reports: "The former Roman Catholic put down her rosary and embraced Islam a decade ago out of disgust with ethnic murders committed by Catholics, including priests, in Rwanda's 1994 genocide. 'I realized that the Catholics do not practice what they preach,' said the 22-year-old Tutsi, whose parents were among the 800,000 people butchered by extremist Hutus. 'When I realized that the people I was praying with killed my parents, I decided to convert to Islam because Muslims saved many lives and did not take part in the killings'" (*Toowoomba's Mail* , 6 January 2005).

How deeply unattractive! Christians – whether Catholics or others – often do not practice what they preach. Too many times Christians are involved in harming those they pray with. How much more attractive it is to save.

Can you imagine what impact Christians could have had in Rwanda if they had all followed the example of the early church? Can you imagine how you and the Christians in your city could

catch the attention of the entire community by living like the first believers? We read about them that *“they devoted themselves ... to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer ... All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need ... praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people ...”* (Acts 2:42-47).

Nothing is as attractive as love. Nothing is more heaven-like than people sharing with each other, sacrificing their own possessions in the process. Who would not want to be part of such a community? The more we love each other, the more others will want to share in that love. Today we commit to becoming attractive in our city. In the design of God we belong together because unity attracts others.



... because we are labouring in the same mission field of the one city. *Romans 1:7: "To all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints ..."* [Read Romans 1:1-7.]

The city of Rome was one of the biggest cities in the world but the apostle Paul viewed the Christian people of that city as one. He wrote to them: *"To all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints ..."* (Romans 1:7). Paul wrote to the many Christian households in Rome and in his letter spelled out common concerns of that city church: *"... I have written you quite boldly on some points ..."* (Romans 15:15).

The first Christians in Jerusalem sat at the feet of the apostles who spoke a common word to the thousands of Christians in that city: *"They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching ..."* (Acts 2:42). Can we imagine the same for our city? Can we imagine that God speaks into our situation by addressing all the saints of the city church together? Is there a word of God which needs to be heard by all Christians of our city? What word would that be?

John Dawson in his book "Taking Our Cities For God" asks his readers: "Why is your town here?" Then he gives examples of God's purposes for various cities. For instance, he writes: "A citizen of Amsterdam has a right to be proud of the centuries-old tradition of hospitality and tolerance that mark the culture of that city. Amsterdam is a genuine city of refuge ... Today, however, it's a city known for tolerating open drug sales and legal prostitution. This is plainly a perversion of a gift ... " Is that right? Does every city have a purpose and does God bestow certain gifts on particular places to be used for his glory? What is our purpose and what are our gifts? What is the word of God which needs to be heard by all Christians in our city?

These are interesting questions and I am sure that the answers coming from God would be even more interesting. However, over and over again we are not ready to receive. Our visions are too small and then how many times have we missed out on hearing from God because the apparent messenger from God was not one of us? We doubt the messenger because he may not be clergy or male or traditional or charismatic or whatever. Maybe we judge that a different opinion on an aspect of teaching cancels out any possible citywide use by God.

Let us tune our ears to God. He has a common word for us: *"To all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints ..."* (Romans 1:7). God knows that we belong to each other because we are labouring in the same mission field of the one city.

DAY 19

we belong
to each other...

... because we live on the same land which needs healing. *2 Chronicles 7:14: "If my people, who are called by my name will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land."*
[Read 2 Chronicles 7:11-22.]

When a house is on fire the people living in the house usually give up their differences and work together dousing the fire. When a nation is under attack people usually give up playing politics, unite behind their leaders and defend land and country. Yet Christians sometimes seem to get their priorities mixed up. While cities and nations suffer from the consequences of sin, we keep arguing over less important things than the salvation of our land and people.

Do we not know what is at stake? God intends to give us more than churches. We are to claim and possess the land. We are to be agents of salvation to the land and its people. God says in Isaiah 24:5-6a: *"The earth is . polluted by its inhabitants, for they transgressed laws, violated statutes, and broke the everlasting covenant. Therefore, a curse devours the earth, and those who live in it are held guilty."* Can we see a curse devouring our neighbourhood? How much has sin polluted where we are? It is time for Christians to give up their differences and work together cleansing the earth and its people by doing what God says in the Scriptures: *"If my people, who are called by my name will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land"* (2 Chronicles 7:14).

Can we learn to appreciate each other in a time of crisis? Anyone who kneels beside us, repents and prays on behalf of themselves and the entire community is a partner in the healing of the land. We belong to each other because we live on the same land which needs healing.

DAY 20

we belong
to each other...

... because we are one in our brokenness at the foot of the cross. *Galatians 2:20: "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me ... "* / *1 John 1:8: "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us."* / *Hebrews 12:1: " ... sin that so easily entangles ... "* [Read Galatians 2:11-21.]

"Just imagine that they are all naked." This is advice given to performers who are intimidated by the watching crowd. And while that advice may not be flattering to the paying audience, it can be effective. Naked people are somehow not in a position to give damning reviews. The veneer of their education, status and attitude comes off and there they are – naked and vulnerable like the rest of us.

As Christians we are also a naked crowd. We are likewise not in a position to be intimidating and damning. As we have all come before Jesus and knelt at the foot of the cross, we have been stripped of self-righteousness and pride. Our former self was judged sinful and in rebellion against God. Thus, when it mattered we came up empty and naked.

It was Jesus who had to sacrifice his life for us on the cross. It was Jesus who suffered punishment and died because of our sin, so that we would receive new life from him. The Bible says: *"I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law Christ died for nothing"* (Galatians 2:20-21).

Christians cannot give each other damning reviews acting like a paying crowd that has rights. Somehow we are all naked. Our own performances amounted to nothing. We have all been crucified with Christ and no longer live, but Christ lives in each of us. We were all judged to be sinners and even now our works and achievements fall short of God's holy standards. Every Christian lives by the grace of God and every day depends on God's undeserved love. Let us learn humility. We belong to each other because we are one in our brokenness at the foot of the cross.

DAY 21

we belong to each other...

... because the cross tears down the dividing wall between people. *Ephesians 2:14-18:* *"For Christ himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new person out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross ..."* [Read Ephesians 2:11-22.]

Laws keep people separate. In Australia there is an ongoing debate as to whether Aboriginals should be able to live according to tribal laws and therefore be exempt from some standards which the rest of Australia holds dear. This is an ongoing debate and a painful one because the challenge is how we can become one nation if two peoples follow separate law-codes and thereby cement their separate identities.

Christians know about laws that keep them separate. Here are some of them: Do not drink alcohol. Do worship on Saturdays instead of Sundays. You must give your tithe. Do not apply make-up. You must speak in tongues. Do not ordain women ... Not all Christians consider all of these laws as binding and therefore different standards emerge. How then can Christians live together as one?

As we follow separate laws we cannot enjoy fellowship, or can we? On which day would we come together for worship? Does one Christian have to walk out of the meeting whenever another Christian orders an alcoholic drink? Would some Christians never be able to worship with others when a woman was preaching? I am afraid that there are laws that keep us separate.

So it was in the time of the early church. Most Jewish Christians followed the ancient laws which Jesus himself had kept. They circumcised male babies and observed a strict diet which was controlled by what food the Bible judged to be clean or unclean. Non-Jewish Christians were

not used to these laws and struggled to keep them. What was the Christian community to do? The Bible says: *“For Christ himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new person out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross ...”* (Ephesians 2:14-18).

Jesus Christ abolished in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. He created in himself one new person out of warring factions. Can we hear that? Can we consider that laws in isolation from what happened on the cross cannot be binding on Christians? Let us wipe the slate clean. It is a good discipline to surrender our traditions to scrutiny and then together inquire about the new person that has been created by the cross of Christ. We belong to each other because the cross tears down the dividing wall between people.

one at the cross STUDY 3 overview

Warm-Up

- 1 Can you name one Christian leader that you really admire and respect?
- 2 What makes that leader special?

Snippets From The Message:

“ ... Tommy Tenney writes in his book on church unity: ‘The issue is never the issue. The issue is always control ... The struggle for control destroys any hope of unity among us’ (Tommy Tenney: *God's Dream Team*, Ventura 1999, p37) ... the foolishness of the crucified Jesus confronts me also. The cross wrests control from me. The cross exposes my language of control. It is not my patch, my congregation, my personal space, my members, my church. It is God's church which thrives on apparent weakness – a crucified Saviour ... The cross nullifies, humbles, shames the wise, confounds those in control, bewilders, leads along a road which is clean contrary to all that we choose or contrive or desire. But that is all right. The cross destroys, only to grant new life ... Galatians 2:20: ‘I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me.’ ... can we listen again to Jesus' prayer when he prayed: ‘ ... may they be brought to complete unity ... ‘ (John 17:23), ‘ ... may they be one as we are one’ (John 17:11). Can the cross make us one in Christ so that our unity reflects the perfect intimacy of love and perfect synergy of labour enjoyed by God the Father and God the Son? The issue is control. Who has it? ... “

Notes:

one at the cross

STUDY 3 let's talk... what now?...

Let's Talk About It

- 1 Feel free to voice your first impressions in response to the video message. Then tackle some of the following questions.
- 2 Do you think that Tommy Tenney is right when he says: "The issue is never the issue. The issue is always control ... The struggle for control destroys any hope of unity among us"? Why do controlling people always destroy unity – be it in marriage, family life, work environment and church? How does it feel to be around such people?
- 3 What is the apostle Paul saying in the following Bible passage. 1 Corinthians 1:17–2:5: " ... the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God ... God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things – and the things that are not – to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him ... I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified ... " Why does the cross of Christ wrest control from us?
- 4 Martin Luther said: "It is impossible for a person not to be puffed up by his good works unless he has first been deflated and destroyed by suffering and evil [the cross] until he knows that he is worthless and that his works are not his but God's." Likewise Watchman Nee said: "The Cross is more than a doctrine; it must be put into practice ... We must be stricken again and again ... until we are surrendered and proud no more" (Watchman Nee: The Release Of The Spirit, Cloverdale 1965, p64). What do these quotes mean for our lives and what do they mean for God's dealings with us as he prepares us for a life of community?
- 5 How has suffering matured you in your faith?

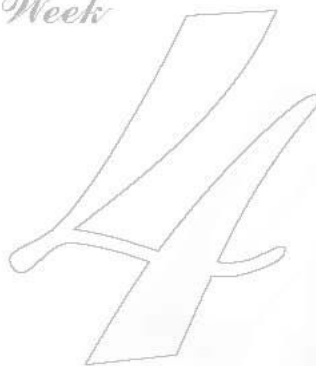
What Now

- 1 What can you do to make other Christians feel at ease and free from control in combined meetings?
- 2 What can the Christians in our community do to hand control over to Jesus Christ?

one through prayer



Week



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... because agreement in prayer moves God to respond. *James 5:16*: "Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective." / *Matthew 18:19-20*: " ... if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them." / *Psalms 133*: "How good and pleasant it is when brothers and sisters live together in unity ... that's where God commands the blessing, ordains eternal life." [Read Matthew 18:15-20.]

Unity comes with power. This seems to be a design feature of creation because when people in the Bible said: "Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves and not be scattered over the face of the whole earth" (Genesis 11:4), God responded by saying: " ... if as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them ... " (Genesis 11:6).

Nothing will be impossible for a united people. If that is true even for a rebellious people who tried to make a name for themselves apart from God, how much more is it true for the church? Jesus said: " ... if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them" (Matthew 18:19-20). One pastor claimed that when Christians pray together their combined prayer power grows exponentially. Thus, when two agree in prayer, their prayers do not double in strength but intensify ten-fold. When three agree in prayer, they are praying with the force of one thousand. When four agree in prayer, they become like ten thousand. Maybe God cannot be contained in any formula but the basic principle stands. Unity comes with power. Agreement in prayer moves God to respond.

In the West Salomons an entire village came to believe in Jesus Christ. As one people they repented of their sins, fasted and prayed. Their agreement in repentance had some amazing results. Not only did they receive forgiveness from God and enjoyed reconciliation with each other, they found that even nature around them was impacted. Wild pigs which caused havoc among their crops disappeared. Black ants which had reached plague proportions likewise disappeared. Fish returned to the ponds. When a pastor from the West Salomon reported these occurrences, numerous Western pastors remained skeptical because this does not easily fit into the modern Western mind-set. Nonetheless, unity in prayer comes with power and the Bible is full of remarkable outcomes of joint prayers. Prayer has shaken the earth more than once (e.g.: Acts 4:23-31).

Who knows what God may do among us? Can we meet? We belong to each other because agreement in prayer moves God to respond.

... because our unity in love is the key to the knowledge of God. *Colossians 2:2-5: "My purpose is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ ... " / 1 John 4:7-8: " ... let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love."* [Read 1 John 4:7-12.]

There are movies which you cannot watch unless you are wearing special glasses. A person wields a sword and that sword seems to leap out from the screen and pierce you. A bird seems to take off and fly above you over the cinema seats. Exciting stuff! Three dimensions come alive on the screen. However, unless we see these scenes through 3-D glasses we are none the wiser. In fact we complain about bad picture quality.

It is not so different with God. The Bible says: "God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God and God in him" (1 John 4:16). The Bible says again: "No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us" (1 John 4:12). There is much going on in these verses but on a basic level we can say that unless people love and see the world through love they cannot perceive and know the God of love. There are dimensions leaping off the screen of this world which require the special glasses of love.

Some people look at the cross and say that God is cruel to have sacrificed his one and only son for the sin of the world. They miss how wide and long and high and deep is the love of God which gave up everything for the sake of love. They miss the love of Christ who shed his blood willingly. Some people look at the church and say that not much can be done with that bunch of hypocrites. They miss the point that we are saints forgiven and loved by the one who is powerful in weakness.

Love makes us see with the eyes of God who himself is love. The Bible encourages us: "Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God" (1 John 4:7). The encouragement is to show love to one another. The more we love the more we will know God – not least because he chooses to infuse our love with his love: "... if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us." (1 John 12). Think today of a way to love another Christian in your city. Wait for it. You will know God. We belong to each other because everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God.

we belong
to each other...

DAY 24

... because we want to become mature together attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. *Ephesians 4:13: " ... until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ."* [Read Ephesians 4:7-16.]

Unity and maturity belong together. A small village in Germany managed to compete in one of the higher football leagues of the country. Year after year they brought up strong players. How did they achieve that? At one denomination's church seminary students of the same year level could

be counted on to grow to similar levels of effectiveness and learning. What dynamic was at work here?

This is not so difficult. Unity and maturity belong together. As young players test their skills against the best player of the club in mid-week training sessions, they are stretched and absorb the finesse of their mates. As the weaker students interact and debate with the brightest students, they mature in their own thought processes.

We cannot ignore this principle. The Bible admonishes us as the church: *"Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit ... It was he who gave some to be apostles, ... prophets, ... evangelists, ... pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up, until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ"* (Ephesians 4:3-13).

United we stand a chance to attain to the fullness of Christ. As apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers stretch us, we rise up to the same level of faith, knowledge and maturity. Thus, in practical ways we need to rub shoulders with the other Christians of our city and if we find this a little unattractive, then football players and seminary students may remind us once again that they do not condemn and exclude the less competent. Instead they bring them up to maturity and we Christians have even more incentive to do the same.

Misplaced pride may now begin to tempt us. Maybe we begin to approach church unity by insisting that others need to learn from us while we do not need to learn from them because it is our denomination, tradition and theology that match the best of God's apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers.

There is no room for such pride. *"To each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it"* (Ephesians 4:7). There is something to learn from every Christian and therefore we espouse the humility of all good students. We belong to each other because we want to become mature together attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.



... **because together we are the temple of God.** *1 Corinthians 3:16: "Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you?"* [Read 1 Corinthians 3:1-17.]

When there is television coverage in sport's stadiums there always seems to be someone holding up the sign: "John 3:16". That verse in the Bible is a key summary of the Christian message. However, there is another 3:16 which in today's church also deserves to be held up on signs everywhere. 1 Corinthians 3:16 reads: *"Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you?"*

A pastor friend of mine always thought that this verse applied to the individual person and meant that every Christian is God's temple. However, one day he discovered what the words really meant when a different Bible translation brought clarity: *"Don't you realize that all of you together are the temple of God and that the Spirit lives in you?"* When my friend realized that not any one Christian on their own but the community of Christians together is the temple of God, he

determined to dedicate his life to church unity. For 30 years he strove to bring pastors and leaders together for prayer and action.

There is more. 1 Corinthians 3:16 comes with a warning in verse 17 and maybe today we have to hear that warning again: *“If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him; for God's temple is sacred, and you are that temple.”* This warning is addressed to the squabbling church of Corinth where factions threatened to tear the church apart: *“I could not address you as spiritual but as worldly – mere infants in Christ ... you are still not ready ... since there is jealousy and quarreling among you ... one says, 'I follow Paul,' and another, 'I follow Apollos,' ... “* (1 Corinthians 3:1-4). After centuries of dividing ourselves into more and more church groupings and destroying Christian unity in the process, the biblical warning almost seems quaint and out of touch with reality. However, could it be that we are under a curse because we have not heeded the warning: *“If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him; for God's temple is sacred, and you are that temple”?*

In the Old Testament the glory of God would fill the temple after the construction of that temple was completed (cf. 2 Chronicles 7:1). In a similar way we Christians dare to hope that once church unity restores the temple of God in our midst, the Holy Spirit has new possibilities to fill and refresh us. We belong to each other because together we are the temple of God.

DAY 26

we belong
to each other..

... because the same Spirit makes us complement each other. *Romans 12:4-5: "Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others." / 1 Corinthians 12:12-13: "The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body – whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free – and we were all given the one Spirit to drink."* [Read Romans 12:3-8.]

An instrument on its own cannot sound like an orchestra. The same holds true for a Christian who on his own cannot stand in for the combined church. The sound of salvation would not be the same.

In an orchestra everything from the tiniest flute to the biggest tuba needs to harmonize with each other for the fullness of orchestra music to come forth. Cymbals, cellos, piano, trumpets and violins need to complement each other for intricate musical themes to culminate in fantastic crescendos. Likewise, Christians need each other to strike all the notes of our relationship with Jesus Christ which is God's score of salvation.

The Bible does not use the image of an orchestra to describe the church but makes the same point by saying that the church is like a body with many harmonizing body parts: *“Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others”* (Romans 12:4-5).

In the orchestra of the one-body-church each member belongs to all the others. Each one of us plays their instrument to add notes to the complete sound of God's presence among us which

includes social justice, charismatic renewal, evangelical faith, liturgical richness, traditional values, contemporary connections and orthodox theology themes.

It is even possible that more than one melody is played at the same time. Among musicians this is called counterpoint or the art of combining independent lines. Various instruments pursue divergent melody lines but do so without compromising the combined orchestra sound and this rather adds to the potent beauty of the music.

Christians can learn from that by embracing counterpoint among themselves. In the orchestra of the church God weaves together many melodies to make the music sound the fullness of his glory. God combines a multitude of programs and faith expressions into one magnificent noise where all orchestra players are fully engaged in their roles and yet all harmonizing with each other.

Just listen to the way all the notes are coming together. Jesus, the head of the orchestra, is a wonderful conductor and we remember the day with thanks when the Holy Spirit made us join this orchestra. We belong to each other because God makes us complement each other.



... **because the same Spirit inspires us for the common good.** *1 Corinthians 12:7: "Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good."* [Read 1 Corinthians 12:4-11.]

In 2004 tsunami waves drowned people and devastated the landscape in many countries of Asia. Therefore our city plans to partner with a coastal city in India, send and supply teams of helpers and assist in rebuilding what has been destroyed. Now imagine that the people we send forget their mission and instead of serving other people become proud of their own expertise. Bricklayers look down upon plumbers who in turn look down on financial advisers. Everyone elevates their unique set of skills and then smiles with satisfaction on their source of pride dismissing any other contributions.

Thankfully, that sort of scenario is not likely because the devastation is so great. Everyone and everyone's skills will be needed to make the community whole again – overcome grief and destruction. Whatever any individual has to offer is for the common good of repaired roads, clean water, electricity and shelter.

As Christians doing the 40 Days of Unity campaign we may not live in tsunami-affected cities but the same dynamic operates also within our communities. God wants us to appreciate each other and recognize the unique value of each other's contributions. The Bible says: *"Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good"* (1 Corinthians 12:7). Each one of us offers something for the common good.

At the same time the words of the Bible impress on us that we have no reason to become proud. It is the Holy Spirit, not we ourselves, that *"gives to each one, just as he determines"* (1 Corinthians 12:11). The Holy Spirit is in fact such a rich source of diverse manifestations that the diversity can become confusing. Do we really need that many giftings and such a wide range of skills?

The ancient congregation of Corinth seemed to struggle with the concept of manifold manifestations which prompted the apostle Paul to write to them and assure them: *“There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all people ... To one there is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom, to another the message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, ... All these are the work of one and the same Spirit ... “* (1 Corinthians 12:4-11). Paul hammered the point that the diversity of many gifts comes from one and the same Spirit. The great display of spiritual wonders does really come from our one God who is abundantly rich in grace and mercy. Thus, the great company of gifted fellow-believers can be trusted and appreciated because Paul also declares: *“... no one can say, 'Jesus is Lord,' except by the Holy Spirit”* (1 Corinthians 12:3).

God has plans for our cities and nations. He longs to see our communities transformed and the tsunamis of sinful destruction cleaned up. He makes us belong to each other because the same Spirit inspires us with diverse gifts and for the common good.

DAY 28 we belong to each other...

... because the same Spirit makes us depend on each other. *Ephesians 4:15-16: “... we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.”* [Read 1 Corinthians 12:12-31.]

A body can only thrive as *“each part does its work”* (Ephesians 4:16). It does not take a genius to recognize that *“the eye cannot say to the hand: 'I don't need you!' And the head cannot say to the feet: 'I don't need you!' ... “* (1 Corinthians 12:21). However, in the church which is the body of Christ as the Bible says: *“Now you are the body of Christ ... “* (1 Corinthians 12:27), we feel free to contradict this basic logic. In the church we feel free to say to each other: “I do not need you.”

People who labour in prayer may look down upon those that have a heart for social justice. Teachers may compete with prophets. Then we often vie for control of the body forgetting that the church is the body of Christ and under his control. The fact is that we need each other because that is the plan of God. According to his intentions *“... we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body ... and we were all given the one Spirit to drink”* (1 Corinthians 12:12-13).

One body part may not go so well and even become unhealthy but we can never say: “I do not need you.” We heal each other with the love of Christ. Have you thought of praying for the person that does not seem to fit in with your plans? Why do we not begin to accept and appreciate each other for being members of the same body?

The fact is that we need everyone to excel in their place because only together can we transform our cities and nations. We belong to each other because the same Spirit makes us depend on each other. Together we are the body of Christ.

one through prayer

STUDY 4 overview

Warm-Up

- 1 How do you feel about prayer? Is praying easy or hard?
- 2 Do you enjoy the prayer time in church or at home?
- 3 Are you comfortable praying in public either in a small group or big assembly?

Snippets From The Message:

“Jesus prayed for us to be one. Maybe he knew that nothing would come as hard to us as getting along in one church. Jesus prayed for us to be one and – that’s what appears to be the case – he made sure that we know the content of his prayer because we are to repeat the words after him. Jesus prayed – John 17:20-23: ‘... I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message that all of them may be one ... may they be one as we are one ... May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.’ As divided and obstinate as we are nothing but prayer brings us together. Jesus knew that and therefore he prayed what we are to pray also ...As we humble ourselves together before our one God, as we kneel on the floor side by side lifting our eyes up to him, we recognize on the deepest level that we are one: equally crying out to God, equally dependent on our Father in heaven, equally sinful with limited understanding, equally called to be the children of God. None of us can remain proud in prayer. So this is good advice: If you want to work on church unity in your town or city, start praying together ... in this talk I would like to revisit why we pray and why prayer is so powerful. John Wesley said ... : ‘God does nothing but by prayer, and everything with it.’ ...”

Notes

one through prayer

STUDY 4 let’s talk... what now?

Let’s Talk About It

- 1 Feel free to voice your first impressions in response to the video message. Then tackle some of the following questions.
- 2 Do you agree with the following snippet from the video message? “ ... we are the children and heirs of God and therefore he draws us into the family business of prayers and petitions. Father, Son and Holy Spirit draw us into the family business of love and crying

out for those that need love. We exercise authority with God. Without our agreement and partnership and love and cooperation and active petitions God doesn't want to charge ahead." (For the importance of the church in God's operations in the world you may look up Ephesians 1:22-23 and 3:10-11.)

- 3 If prayer is that important, then how much time may a Christian spend in prayer? What is a good length of time? You may look up one or more of the following Bible passages: Mark 14:37-38; Philippians 4:6-7; Acts 6:2-4; Luke 6:12.
- 4 Do you know someone that makes prayer a top priority in life? What does strike you about that person?
- 5 "If you want to work on church unity in your town or city, start praying together." Why is that statement true? Why is prayer a better starting point than sorting out differences in teaching and practice?

What Now

- 1 How can we encourage more combined prayer among us? What are some concrete ideas?
- 2 What can we do to make public prayer times more exciting?

one in repentance



Week
5

Notes

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DAY 29

we belong
to each other...

... **because the same Spirit guides us all.** *John 14:16-17:* “ ... the Father ... will give you another Counselor to be with you forever – the Spirit of truth ... ” / *John 16:13:* “But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth ...” [Read John 16:5-16.]

Sometimes the youth go on a treasure hunt by car. Armed with a street directory and fun instructions they set out to complete certain tasks and work their way to the final destination. In the midst of youth chaos and game hilarity why do most cars manage to end up at the final destination? The answer is that they have all followed the same instructions and used the same street directory.

So it is with us Christians. The church scene in our cities may look chaotic and we may drive around in many different church vehicles. However, we will all get there. We follow the same guide. Jesus said: “*When the Spirit comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgement ... when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth ...*” (John 16:8-13).

Maybe as Christians we can learn to let the Holy Spirit be the guide and not worry so much about the other “cars”. The Spirit can convict others of the truth even without our help or pressure. We are not needed to mediate between the Spirit and other Christians.

In a positive way we could actually appreciate the Christians next to us. The same Spirit guides us all. Therefore we may listen to him together and compare notes. Who knows? Some Christians may read the guide better than we do. Thank God that we belong to each other.

DAY 30

we belong
to each other...

... **because God makes us bear with one another in love.** *Colossians 3:9-15:* “ ... clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other ... And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity ...” [Read Colossians 3:1-17.]

Character maintains unity. Family ties and shared aspirations bring people together but on their own these bonds are not strong enough for unity to endure. What will people do when discord threatens harmony and what will people do when no one is watching? Are we tempted to slander each other or take revenge? Our character determines the answers to these questions and thus determines whether we manage to retain unity.

There are character keys to unity. Christians are to clothe themselves with the character traits of “*compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience*” (Colossians 3:12) which are God’s own character traits as he himself declared: “ ... 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 34:6-7). God wants us to take on his own character

traits so that we “*bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances we may have against one another ...*” (Colossians 3:13). Most of all we are to reflect his love which combines everything into unity: “*... over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity*” (Colossians 3:14).

Is this achievable? Who can share in God’s own character? There is the promise that we only need to reflect what we first receive. Before we do anything we are “*God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved*” (Colossians 3:12) and we are one because “*Christ is all, and is in all*” (Colossians 3:11) which means that “*there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, ... slave or free*” (Colossians 3:11). This promises help and an impartation. Christ, who is all and in all, is also everything in us infusing our character with his for unity.

Then we can do something to reflect what we have first received. Traditional wisdom suggests the following: “Sow a thought, reap an act; sow an act, reap a habit; sow a habit, reap a character; sow a character, reap a destiny.”

What we think determines what we do which in turn determines our habits and ultimately our fully formed character. The Bible concurs and says: “*... put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator*” (Colossians 3:10). Thus, can we watch what we think? There needs to be constant renewing of what we know and think for compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience to form within us and reap the fruit of lasting unity.

Anything that leads to pride, taking offense, jealousy and rage is based on wrong thoughts. We resist selfish logic and rather “*let the word of God dwell in [us] richly as [we] teach and admonish one another with all wisdom*” (Colossians 3:16). We belong to each other because the character traits of God make us bear with one another in love.



... because we are accountable to each other. *Colossians 3:16: "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God." / Romans 15:14: " ... filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another."* [Read 1 Thessalonians 5:12-24.]

Many of us have grown up in the perfect church. Our teaching tradition was the best and we had the truth. Others, if they were any good, only came close to our perfect standard. At least that is what we thought. We would have been offended by the suggestion that we had to learn key insights from other Christians. That would have challenged our identity and reason for separate existence. Our hearts were convinced: “Maybe the world does not need as many as 33,800 different denominations but ours must remain.”

We were blind and may I suggest we still are. At least more often than we care to admit. It is as Jesus said: “*Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye*” (Matthew 7:3). Maybe it is because of our pride but we do not enjoy clear vision. There is a plank of wood in our eyes and we do not even want to know.

Therefore, as humbling as it may be other Christians need to speak into our lives. The Bible says: “*... we urge you . warn those who are idle, encourage the timid, help the weak, be patient with everyone ... Test everything. Hold on to the good ...*” (1 Thessalonians 5:14-22). Christians

are responsible for each other and “*admonish one another with all wisdom*” (Colossians 3:16). Next time we come together with other people of faith in our city and nation why not change our attitude and be open to each other? God is good. We belong to each other because we need to be accountable to each other.

we belong to each other...

DAY 32

... **because we forgive one another as the Lord forgave us.** *Colossians 3:13:* “ ... *Forgive as the Lord forgave you.*” / *Matthew 6:14-15:* “*For if you forgive people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.*” [Read Matthew 18:21-35.]

“Everyone says forgiveness is a lovely idea until they have something to forgive, as we had during the war. And then to mention the subject at all is to be greeted with howls of anger. It is not that people think this too high and difficult a virtue: it is that they think it hateful and contemptible. ‘That sort of talk makes me sick,’ they say. And half of you already want to ask me, ‘I wonder how’d you feel about forgiving [people who killed your family and friends] ... ’” (C.S. Lewis).

The lovely idea of forgiveness becomes difficult when we are the offended party. Corrie ten Boom was preaching in 1947 when the sight of a balding man in a gray overcoat brought back memories from the concentration camp: the huge room with its harsh overhead lights, the pathetic pile of dresses and shoes in the center of the floor, the shame of walking past this man. She could see her sister’s frail form ahead of her, ribs sharply beneath the parchment of skin.

The man drew near, thrust out his hand to her and said: “A fine message, fraulein! How good it is to know that, as you say, all our sins are at the bottom of the sea.” For Corrie ten Boom it was the first time since her release that she had been face to face with one of her captors and her blood seemed to freeze.

Then the man continued: “I have become a Christian. I know that God has forgiven me for the cruel things I did at the concentration camp, but I would like to hear it from your lips as well. Fraulein,” – again the hand came out – “will you forgive me?”

Corrie’s sister died a slow terrible death in that place and thus Corrie wrestled with the most difficult thing she had ever to do in her life. She writes: “ ... I stood there with the coldness clutching my heart. But forgiveness is an act of the will, and the will can function regardless of the temperature of the heart ... And so woodenly, mechanically, I thrust my hand into the one stretched out to me. And as I did an incredible thing took place. The current started in my shoulder, raced down my arm, sprang into our joined hands. And then this healing warmth seemed to flood my whole being, bringing tears to my eyes. ‘I forgive you, brother!’ I cried. ‘With all my heart!’”

Sometimes Christian unity can be that dramatic. The Bible says: “*Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you*” (Ephesians 4:31-32). We belong to each other because we forgive one another as the Lord forgave us.

DAY 33

we belong
to each other...

... **because we all preach Christ.** *Philippians 3:15-18: " ... The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached ... "* [Read Philippians 3:12-18.]

One of my friends is deeply committed to Christian unity but struggles with Philippians 3:15-18: "It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry ... preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely ... But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice." This is an outrageous Bible reading. My friend squirms at rejoicing over some star preachers and detests clergy rivalry, envy and false motives. Does she have to be in unity with those people?

Tony Campolo tells the following story. A friend of his was conversing with one of the older women of the congregation following a church service when the minister's son ran up on the platform, stood in the pulpit, and blurted out over the loudspeaker: "Look, everybody! Look! I'm in the pulpit!" The elderly woman said to Tony's friend: "His father does that every Sunday."

I am a pastor myself and it is true. We are tempted to make ourselves the centre of attention in the pulpit and on occasion I ask myself some hard questions: "Was that last pregnant pause really necessary or was I just enjoying the heightened moment of all eyes on me? What am I doing?"

Nonetheless, the word of salvation is still coming through. Whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached which means that people are hearing about the power of the cross, repentance and forgiveness. God does not depend on the spotless integrity of his messengers. There is power in his word and there is evidence for that.

The musical Jesus Christ Superstar is not necessarily a pure witness to the Son of God. However, in one of the productions the singer of the Jesus role was strongly impacted by the reaction of the crowd. Every night there would come a time when he was hanging on a cross above the audience and every night he would hear people whisper or cry out: "Thank you, Jesus! Praise be to God! Hallelujah!" The message hit home even in these less than perfect conditions and over time the singer did become a Christian himself.

We belong to each other because, whether from false motives or pure, we all preach Christ.

DAY 34

we belong
to each other...

... **because we do not judge one another in disputable matters.** *1 Corinthians 4:5: "Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait till the Lord comes." / Romans 14:1: " ... without passing judgement on disputable matters." / Matthew 7:1-5: "Do not judge, or you too will be judged ... "* [Read Romans 14:1-23.]

A friend of Philip Yancey told him the following story: “A prostitute came to me in wretched straits, homeless, sick, unable to buy food for her two-year-old daughter. Through sobs and tears, she told me she had been renting out her daughter – two years old! – to men interested in kinky sex. She made more renting out her daughter for an hour than she could on her own in a night. She had to do it, she said, to support her own drug habit ... At last I asked if she had ever thought of going to a church for help. I will never forget the look of pure, naive shock that crossed her face. ‘Church!’ she cried. ‘Why would I ever go there? I was already feeling terrible about myself. They’d just make me feel worse.’”

Do we in the church make people feel worse by judging them over and beyond their own self-condemnation? On the one hand Christians are told to “*test everything*” (1 Thessalonians 5:21) and not to “*associate with anyone who calls himself a brother but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler*” (1 Corinthians 5:11). On the other hand, however, there is a strong command not to judge.

Jesus said: “*Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged ...*” (Matthew 7:1-2). Whatever we judge in others will condemn us when we are committing the same sin. Jesus warned us about this important spiritual principle.

The apostle Paul likewise warned about judging each other. He wrote: “*Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgement on disputable matters*” (Romans 14:1), “*Who are you to judge someone else’s servant? To his own master he stands or falls ...*” (Romans 14:4), “*... each of us will give an account of himself to God. Therefore let us stop passing judgement on one another*” (Romans 14:12-13). Thus, according to the apostle Paul we must not judge each other in disputable matters because every Christian is free to follow his own conscience and be directly accountable to God.

God himself refrains from judging before the appointed time. The Bible says: “*God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him*” (John 3:17). Furthermore, we are told: “*... where sin increased, grace increased all the more ... so that grace might reign ...*” (Romans 5:20). This is true and makes us rethink. There must be a way for anyone to share in this grace without us making them feel worse. We belong to each other because as grace reigns we hold back with our judgements.

DAY 35 we belong
to each other...

... because whoever hates his brother or sister in Christ is in the darkness and does not know where he is going. 1 John 2:9-11: “Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates his brother is still in the darkness ... whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks around in the darkness; he does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded him.”
[Read 1 John 2:3-11.]

Among Christians the battle for truth and knowledge is usually fought in universities, Bible colleges, church seminaries and conventions. Papers are given and books are written. Opinions form around Bible knowledge, church history and philosophy. And that is all well and good. However, we can easily miss something. The Bible says: “*The person who says, ‘I know God,’ but*

does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But if anyone obeys his word, God's love is truly made complete in him ... " (1 John 1:4-5).

The Bible says that there is no knowledge of God without doing his commandments and obeying his word. Are we comfortable with that? Our core teaching stresses that salvation is by grace – undeserved love – and not the works of obedience. So Ephesians 2:8-9: *"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God not by works so that no one can boast ..."* Hence we shy away from any undue emphasis on doing the will of God and obedience. In that light the words of 1 John 1:4-5 seem to pose a problem. Can we really combine the knowledge of God with doing his will? Does that not smack of relying once again on works to be right with God?

We have been misled. Our church practice of staging the battle for truth in academic settings is not always helpful. It is by grace that we are saved but then the grace of God keeps empowering us to remain in the presence of God by living according to his will. This is also the intent of the Ephesians passage which continues thus in verse 10: *"For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."*

Is it really that hard to understand? God is love and therefore we need to show love ourselves in order to share in the will and emotions of God. God keeps pouring out his love into our lives so that by living out his love we would learn what he is like.

If we are ready to accept that, then maybe we can now consider 1 John 2:9-11: *"Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates his brother is still in the darkness. Whoever loves his brother lives in the light, and there is nothing in him to make him stumble. But whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks around in the darkness; he does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded him."*

We belong to each other because whoever hates his brother or sister in Christ is in the darkness and does not know where he is going. This is strong language and therefore among Christians we cannot afford battles for truth in purely academic settings. We cannot afford opinionated contests where we indulge in disliking each other. God is love and is only known in love.

one in repentance STUDY 5 overview

Warm-Up

- 1 How do you feel about repenting before God? Is it more a depressing duty or something to be engaged in with purpose and longing?
- 2 Do you think that modern Christians are in the habit of confessing their sins to God?
- 3 How do you feel about confessing in your private devotions and in your church?

Snippets From The Message:

" ... Right now we ... use the first chapter of Nehemiah to relearn three basic Biblical assumptions: 1. When God looks at us, he is not just looking at one person here and one person there, isolated individuals, independent agents. He is looking at us belonging to a community,

belonging to a body of people, being one with others. 2. When we sin, then that is not just a private affair between me and God, but has consequences for the entire community. The sin of one can bring judgement on all. 3. Sin and its side-effects, satanic strongholds and the reaping of judgement, can be removed by those who act on behalf of their community and repent in its place. I repeat: 1. God sees you and me as belonging to and being one with a community. 2. When you or I sin, then that sin has consequences for others as well – the community, our families, churches, cities or nations. 3. As you or I fall on our knees and repent of the sins of our community past and present, we free our communities from the stranglehold of sin through the forgiveness that comes from God ... “

Notes

one in repentance

STUDY 5

let's talk... what now?

Let's Talk About It

- 1 Feel free to voice your first impressions in response to the video message. Then tackle some of the following questions.
- 2 The sin of one in our community can bring judgement on all. Is that fair? On the other hand the righteousness of one can bring blessings on all. Is that deserved? Consider what the Bible says – 1 Corinthians 15:22: "For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive" (cf. Romans 5:12-21).
- 3 Are we used to thinking in terms of community? Do we think that any of our private and hidden conduct can either bless or curse our community?
- 4 What does the Bible say about the potential power of one? Why is that encouragement for prayer? Ezekiel 22:29-30: "The people of the land practice extortion and commit robbery; they oppress the poor and needy and mistreat the alien, denying them justice. I looked for a person among them who would build up the wall and stand before me in the gap on behalf of the land so I would not have to destroy it, but I found none" (cf. Ezekiel 13:4-5).
- 5 Would we consider becoming serious about the following plan of action? "1. We pray that we don't fall into temptation ourselves. God forbid that it is our sin which brings harm first to ourselves and then to our communities. 2. We look at our community, do research and identify where sin has a stronghold among us. 3. On behalf of our community we confess that sin and ask God for forgiveness. 4. Where the sin of our community has wounded others, we repent to those that we have hurt, reconcile and attempt to restore that which has been damaged or destroyed." When and where and how would we do that?

- 6 For Biblical examples of repenting on behalf of one's community see Nehemiah 1:4-7; Daniel 9:20; Jeremiah 3:25; Ezra 9:7; 1 Peter 2:24.

What Now

- 1 What is your community suffering from the most?
- 2 Is there any root cause that needs to be repented before God?

one for our city



Week



Notes

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... because the evil one's strategy is to divide and conquer. *Matthew 12:25*: "... Every kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, and every city or household divided against itself will not stand." / *1 Corinthians 6:7*: "The very fact that you have lawsuits among you means you have been completely defeated already. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be cheated?" / *Ephesians 4:26-27*: "... Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry and do not give the devil a foothold." / *James 3:14-18*: "... For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice ..." [Read James 3:13-18.]

In a Peanuts cartoon Lucy demanded that Linus change TV channels, threatening him with her fist if he didn't. "What makes you think you can walk right in here and take over?" asks Linus. "These five fingers," says Lucy. "Individually they're nothing but when I curl them together like this into a single unit, they form a weapon that is terrible to behold."

"Which channel do you want?" asks Linus. Turning away, he looks at his fingers and says: "Why can't you guys get organized like that?"

Why can we Christians not get organized like that? Why can we not curl together into a single unit? We should be able to form a weapon that is terrible to behold and strike a blow against the powers and principalities of this dark world. Why do we not see that the evil one's strategy is always to divide and conquer.

Jesus says: "... Every kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, and every city or household divided against itself will not stand" (Matthew 12:25). Are we Christians divided against ourselves and is that the reason why we are not able to stand? God counsels us in the Bible: "... For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice ..." (James 3:14-18).

No one wins in a fight especially a fight among ourselves. God says that the church is the body of Christ and therefore "if one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honoured, every part rejoices with it" (1 Corinthians 12:24-26). None of us can thrive when one of us is hurting. We belong to each other and need each other.

Note with how much love God motivates unity among us: "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 ..." (Philippians 2:1-4).

There is encouragement from being united with Christ, comfort from his love, fellowship with the Spirit, tenderness and compassion. Therefore we do resist the devil's strategy. We will not be divided and we will not be conquered. We belong to each other.

... because the weeding out of the undesirables also results in the pulling up of some children of God. Matthew 13:24-50: " ... The kingdom of God is like a person who sowed good seed in his field ... weeds also appeared ... The servants asked him: 'Do you want us to go and pull them up?' 'No,' he answered, 'because while you are pulling the weeds, you may root up the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest.' ... Jesus answered:'... the good seed stands for the children of the kingdom. The weeds are the children of the evil one ... The harvest is the end of the age' ..." [Read Matthew 13:24-30,36-43.]

Tim Hansel ("Eating Problems For Breakfast", Word Publishing 1988, p194-195) imagines that Jesus received the following business letter.

To: Jesus, Son of Joseph Woodcrafter's Carpenter Shop Nazareth 25922

From: Jordan Management Consultants

Dear Sir:

Thank you for submitting the resumes of the twelve men you have picked for managerial positions in your new organization. All of them have now taken our battery of tests; and we have not only run the results through our computer, but also arranged personal interviews for each of them with our psychologist and vocational aptitude consultant. The profiles of all tests are included, and you will want to study each of them carefully.

As part of our service, we make some general comments for your guidance, much as an auditor will include some general statements. This is given as a result of staff consultation, and comes without any additional fee. It is the staff opinion that most of your nominees are lacking in background, education and vocational aptitude for the type of enterprise you are undertaking. They do not have the team concept. We would recommend that you continue your search for persons of experience in managerial ability and proven capability.

Simon Peter is emotionally unstable and given to fits of temper. Andrew has absolutely no qualities of leadership. The two brothers, James and John, the sons of Zebedee, place personal interest above company loyalty. Thomas demonstrates a questioning attitude that would tend to undermine morale. We feel that it is our duty to tell you that Matthew had been blacklisted by the Greater Jerusalem Better Business Bureau; James, the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus definitely have radical leanings, and they both registered a high score on the manic-depressive scale.

One of the candidates, however, shows great potential. He is a man of ability and resourcefulness, meets people well, has a keen business mind, and has contacts in high places. He is highly motivated, ambitious, and responsible. We recommend Judas Iscariot as your controller and right-hand man. All of the other profiles are self-explanatory.

We wish you every success in your new venture.

Sincerely,

Jordan Management Consultants

How dangerous our judging can be! We may judge people to be unfit for service when God has chosen them to be leaders. Even when we judge people with discernment such judging poses

many dangers. Jesus said that we belong to each other – at least for now – because the weeding out of the undesirables also results in the pulling up of some children of God.

DAY 38 we belong to each other...

... because the greater we become the more we serve each other. *Matthew 20:24-28*: " ... whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave ... " [Read Matthew 20:20-28.]

In China various leaders of house church networks could no longer walk together in unity. Some believed that they were the only ones who held the truth and despised other groups as cults that should be avoided at all costs. The spirit of denominationalism was rampant.

When one pastor told another leader his vision for unity, that leader just laughed saying: "That's impossible! We will have nothing to do with the others!" This upset the pastor so much that he felt like hitting him. Yet, he knew that if the Chinese church was ever to take the gospel outside of China, they could not continue remaining divided and full of hate for each other.

Before a crucial meeting of network leaders one of the leaders received a prophetic word that he was not to sit down with the others and talk with them straight away. He was not even to pray with them before he got on his knees and washed their feet one by one. This leader who led millions of believers across China immediately responded: "I accept this as a word from the Lord. I'll certainly wash their feet."

The meeting went ahead but deteriorated quickly with old wounds resurfacing. One leader slapped his knee and announced: "All this talk is a waste of time. Let's pray and then we'll leave." He began to pray with his eyes closed when the other network leader finally acted on the prophetic word, knelt in front of him and started gently to take off his shoes and socks. The other opened his eyes and was amazed. He could not believe that this was happening, cried out and wrapped his arms around his brother in Christ. Thirteen years of rumours, bitterness and jealousies were washed away. Everyone in the room sought the Lord's mercy and forgiveness. Many confessions of sin were made from one leader to another (from the book "The Heavenly Man" by Brother Yun).

The pastor who led millions of believers across China displayed true leadership when he humbled himself and began to wash the feet of his rival. He displayed the kind of leadership which Jesus himself modeled and commanded and it is the only kind of leadership which will manage to maintain unity among Christians. Jesus said: " ... whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave – just as the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve ... " (Matthew 20:24-28).

We belong to each other because the greater we become the more we serve each other.

DAY 39 we belong to each other...

... because we together are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that we may declare the praises of him who called us out of darkness into his wonderful light. *1 Peter 2:9: "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of the darkness into his wonderful light."* [Read 1 Peter 2:4-12.]

Salvation is not only an individual experience. It is also a corporate experience. Perhaps nowhere is this better illustrated in Scripture than in the account of Moses leading the Hebrews from their Egyptian enslavement to the land of promise. The whole Exodus event, the Old Testament paradigm of salvation, was a corporate event of huge proportions.

Let it be recognized and acknowledged that our individual Christian experience will be diminished without the corporate dimension into which we are all called. We are saved as individuals to be included in his body: "*For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body ...*" (1 Corinthians 12:13).

In the current Fijian revival, the Fijians with their community-based culture see the greater importance in the unity of the church, tribe and even their race. In fact the individual's life only has meaning as they submit to and experience the corporate.

The church is God's corporate family. We belong because we are chosen by him to be in his family. The church family is central to God's purposes and as individuals we are family members of this wonderful kingdom community.

In our physical body the real significance of each member is found in its "membership" of, and function in, the support of that body. So it is with the spiritual body. As God's chosen people our belonging to one another is a great matter for praise which in turn is a witness to God's light in a dark world. [Written by Ian Shelton.]

DAY 40 we belong
to each other...

... because there is only one heaven for all of us. *Ephesians 4:5-6: "There is one body and one Spirit – just as you were called to one hope when you were called – one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all."* [Read Philipians 3:12-4:2.]

A little girl was taking an evening walk with her father. Wonderingly, she looked up at the stars and exclaimed: "Oh, daddy, if the wrong side of heaven is so beautiful, what must the right side be" (Charles L. Allen)! Even the wrong side of heaven is beautiful especially when the beautiful sky is matched by the beauty of our transformed hearts. God makes us one and he makes us love one another. How wonderful that can be. And yet, the right side of heaven is more beautiful still. We share the same breath-taking hope for the future as the Bible says: "*... as you were called to one hope when you were called ...*" (Ephesians 4:5-6).

We live in the same city and we work towards the transformation of our city and nation. However, our connection with each other goes deeper than sharing the same post-code of our earthly residence. The Bible says: "*But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Saviour from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything*

under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body” (Philippians 3:20-21).

Wow! Living and working in our cities will not be in vain. Christ will come and will bring everything under his control. Everything will be completely transformed. We, the citizens of heaven, will have come home. Does that not determine our relationships? We belong to each other because there is only one heaven for all of us and together we are its citizens.

STUDY 6 one for our city overview

Warm-Up

- 1 How do you feel about the role your church plays in the city?
- 2 How comfortable would you be, if your pastor(s) spent a significant amount of time being active in city affairs rather than pastoring one's own church members?

Snippets From The Message:

“ ... Church unity leads to the pastoring of cities – not just congregations ... Tommy Tenney writes: 'As long as you just pastor your church, that's all you'll ever have. But if you can start pastoring your city, then revival will come to your city. It is time for the gatekeepers to take their places in the gates and to guard the source of influence over a city' (Tommy Tenney: God's Dream Team, Ventura 1999, p90) ... Change happens slowly. Christians mature slowly. A city transforms slowly. Usually there is a slow progression from spiritual milk to solid meat. Therefore a one-off event or activity cannot be a substitute for sustained outreach and nurture ... Once again, how can we plan for long-term transformation without getting bogged down by a federal system where no true leadership emerges? The answer is difficult and we have to be careful. We may benefit from hearing the warning again: “We need more prayer, before any strategy.” ... As we move from a federal system to a system where we recognize citywide church leadership of some sort, much prayer and spiritual discernment is needed – let alone humility and the surrendering of pride ... City elders, gate keepers – call them what you like – they include more than just ordained people because we need leadership in the spheres of government, education, business, media, and so on, and pastors are not usually the experts in these spheres ... how God wants to raise up the various leaders even in our city I don't know. And whether we would be willing to recognize them I don't know either. However, allow me to share some personal thoughts ... “

STUDY 6 one for our city let's talk... what now?

Let's Talk About It

- 1 Feel free to voice your first impressions in response to the video message. Then tackle some of the following questions.

- 2 What would have to change so that we do not just pastor congregations but our city? What does it mean to pastor a city?
- 3 Why do we need church unity for the pastoring of cities and nations?
- 4 As a church do you more or less mind your own business or do you invest resources into transforming the city's spheres of politics, commerce, education, media, and so on?
- 5 How may we encourage Christians to be church also at their work-place?
- 6 What do you think about the practice of the first Christians meeting both in private homes and combined city worship? See Acts 2:46-47: "Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. [And] they broke bread in their homes and ate together [there] ... praising God ..."

What Now

- 1 What is God already doing in your city in terms of citywide church leadership? Where can you join in?
- 2 Where can you bless and transform your city outside of church gatherings? You may think of work, schools, volunteer organizations, raising families, ...