

TO GE TH ER

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**TO
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LIVING TOGETHER IN
CHRIST-CENTERED COMMUNITY

FOLLOW-UP DEVOTIONAL JOURNAL

TO
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THIS BOOK BELONGS TO: _____

DATE STARTED: _____

PUBLISHED BY YM360

*“NOW
THE FULL
NUMBER
OF THOSE
WHO
BELIEVED
WERE OF
ONE HEART
AND
SOUL . . . ”*

ACTS 4:32

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GETTING STARTED

Look around you. In our world today, there is more division than there is unity. Think about it . . . The world works to use our differences to divide us. And while there are moments when we may join together for a cause or to address an issue, we spend much of our time focusing on what keeps us apart.

It can be a hopeless feeling at times. And yet, the good news is that the Gospel has the answer. The Gospel says that in Christ, we are united. We are together.

If you have recently gone through a study of *Together* with your church or youth group, you may feel like you've already learned a lot about unity. You may feel like you've been challenged to unite with your friends, regardless of your differences, to share God's love with the world. You may have been called to make your youth ministry a safe place where people feel valued and cared for. You may have even been challenged to lead out into culture, as one, motivated by the mission of advancing the Gospel.

BUT GUESS WHAT? YOU'RE JUST GETTING STARTED.

This book will take you on a four-week journey of going deeper into exactly what it means to be united, together, as God's answer to reaching the world in His name. Embrace this journey. Give it your best. Commit to sticking with this book until the end. It will only take a few minutes each day. And you'll find that your life will be richer as a result of spending such quality time in God's presence.

LET'S GET STARTED. LOOK AT THE NEXT PAGE TO LEARN HOW THIS BOOK WORKS.

START WITH THIS ADVICE

Whether you're super-committed and read your Bible each day or struggle to read a few verses a couple of times a week, the key to sticking with this through four weeks is commitment. Your routine may change, but your commitment to meet God each day has to be there. Tell yourself that whether or not you read this journal at the same time each day, or if you read it whenever you get a few extra minutes, you'll make it a priority in your daily life.

HAVE YOUR BIBLE OPEN

Resist the urge to ignore the spots where this book will tell you to read a passage of Scripture. This book is only a guide for the Book. **The close relationship with God that you want only happens by reading and doing what's in the Bible.** Have it open as you go through this book.

EACH WEEK IS STRUCTURED THE SAME, BUT IS REALLY DIFFERENT

Each week's content works in similar ways. **But, each day is different.** Some will take 3-5 minutes, some 10-15. Some will ask you to look at two or three passages of Scripture; some will just ask you to think about a concept. The variety will make it easier to stick with and help you learn in different ways that are suited to you.

WHAT IF I MISS A DAY OF READING? OR THREE?

Don't give up! Take this at your pace! The goal is for you to grow closer to God. If you miss a day or two . . . or four . . . don't throw in the towel. Pick this book back up and start where you left off. **You can do this!** And by doing it, you'll show the world that God makes an incredible difference in the lives of His followers. So, hang in there! You've got this!

Well, that's what you need to know to get started! **Turn the page to read the introduction to Week 1.**

WEEK ONE

Before starting Week 1, read this short introduction

There are certain bonds that tie you to other people.

Family. Friends. Teammates. Bandmates.

There are people with whom you are united because of a degree of commonality. Family is easy. The ties that bind family together run deep. It may be a little different with friends. There are a variety of things that may serve to connect you. But the point is this: there are people all around us whom you could point to and say, “I am connected to this person.”

Have you ever stopped and really dug into what connects you with the other people in your church or youth group? You most likely have a basic understanding, but do you know the true nature of your connection? Do you know exactly what draws you together?

This first week is all about helping you understand what it means to be unified as a church. The goal is for you to leave this week with a new understanding of how you and your friends are bound together in Christ. Because understanding this is the key to realizing God’s plan for the Church.

IF YOU’RE READY TO GET STARTED, TURN TO PAGE 10
FOR WEEK 1, DAY 1.

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WEEK ONE

DAY 1

Read today's devotion below and answer the questions on page 11.

The idea of togetherness is one we'll be dealing with for the next four weeks. Let's begin laying the foundation for what we mean when we talk about being united together as a church.

Turn to Ephesians 2:11-22. This is the Apostle Paul writing to the Christ-followers in the church at Ephesus. In this particular passage, Paul is explaining to those Christians, most of whom were Gentiles (or non-Jews), the awesome truth of what Jesus had done to bring them into the family of God. Let's read this passage and see what we can learn about the togetherness God calls us to.

Read Ephesians 2:11-12. Paul reminds the Gentile Christians that at one time they were separated from Jesus, both by their sins and by the fact that they were not Jews, God's chosen people. Paul describes them as strangers to the promises of God. But then, Paul reminds them of something really cool. In verses 13-16, Paul says that through faith in the work Jesus did on the cross, anyone can be brought into the family of God, Jew or Gentile. Paul says that Jesus made peace with God possible through His sacrifice on the cross. Jesus destroyed any division between Christian Jews and Christian Gentiles, making a unified body through faith in Him.

Paul writes something amazing in verses 17-22. Paul says in verse 19 that anyone who has come to saving faith in Jesus is part of the same family, God's family! When you profess your faith in Jesus, you become part of the Church, the family of all people who believe in God. What an awesome picture! That's a kind of togetherness that's hard to wrap our brains around. But that's the description of you and your Christian friends. You guys are a family. You are together.

Read the following questions and use the space provided to write down your answers.

1. Look back at that passage from Ephesians. In one sentence, sum up what God did to make “togetherness” possible.

2. Define the “church” in your own words. What does it mean to you to be a part of the church?

3. When you think of the church, who or what do you think of? Are your first thoughts to your local church? Or to your youth group? Do you ever consider the global church, the folks all around the world who believe in Jesus too? What do you think your answers say about your role in the church?

4. You may have never thought about any of this before. That’s fine. Now is the perfect time to start. Spend some time in prayer today asking God to open your eyes and your heart to what the church really is and what your role in it should be. Pray that God would show you how you and your friends can grow together for the sake of being on mission for God.

WEEK ONE

DAY 2

Who can experience the “togetherness” of God’s family? Read today’s devotional and find out.

So we’re dealing with this idea of being together and what it means for you and your friends.

But before we get too far down this road, let’s answer an important question: “Who gets in”? What has to happen to become a part of the awesome togetherness of the Church?

The Bible is pretty clear about this. Becoming part of God’s family is a pretty amazing thing. But we can’t become a part of God’s family on our own. We have to have help. Let’s unpack this a bit.

FIRST, OUR SIN MAKES US ENEMIES OF GOD.

Yikes! That’s right. Enemies. We can’t even begin to become part of God’s family because our sin separates us from God. (Romans 3:23, Rom. 5:12)

THE ONLY RIGHT PUNISHMENT FOR SIN IS DEATH.

Again, yikes! Paul says in Romans 6:23 that what sin earns for us is death. God is the Creator and life giver. Sin is rebellion against Him, and the only right response to rebellion against the Almighty is death. Harsh, but true.

Stop here for a second. So, left on our own, not only is it far-fetched to think about experiencing togetherness with God and His children, without God’s help we deserve death. Take a second and write down how this makes you feel:

Here's the great news: God made a way for us to be in relationship with Him and to be a part of His family.

JESUS MAKES A WAY FOR US TO BE SET FREE FROM THE DEATH OUR SIN DESERVES.

Jesus died on the cross to pay the penalty for our sins that only He could pay, paving the way to once-and-for-all clear us of the debt our sin earns (2 Cor. 5:21). How do we have this payment count for our sins? Simple. Paul lays it out clearly: "Because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." When we profess our belief in Jesus, we are saved from our sins and brought into relationship with God.

In a world where nothing is free, how does it make you feel to know that you can't earn your way into a relationship with God?

If you could write a few sentences to express to Jesus your thankfulness for what He did on the cross, what would you say?

FINALLY, JESUS MAKES IT POSSIBLE FOR US TO BE WELCOMED INTO THE FAMILY OF GOD.

We're going to examine this in more detail this week. But think back on yesterday's passage. Paul says in Ephesians 2:19, "So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God." If you have come to faith in Jesus, you are a child of God.

Have you come to saving faith in Jesus? Where are you on your faith journey with Him? How would you describe your relationship with God?

What about what you have read today makes you want to share the good news of Jesus with others? Why is it so important to do so?

WEEK ONE

DAY 3

Read today's devotion and answer the questions on page 15.

FOR IN CHRIST JESUS YOU ARE ALL SONS OF GOD, THROUGH FAITH. FOR AS MANY OF YOU AS WERE BAPTIZED INTO CHRIST HAVE PUT ON CHRIST. THERE IS NEITHER JEW NOR GREEK, THERE IS NEITHER SLAVE NOR FREE, THERE IS NO MALE AND FEMALE, FOR YOU ARE ALL ONE IN CHRIST JESUS. AND IF YOU ARE CHRIST'S, THEN YOU ARE ABRAHAM'S OFFSPRING, HEIRS ACCORDING TO PROMISE.

- GALATIANS 3:26-29

Think about the things or categories the world uses to define, group, and divide people. List some of them below:

What does verse 26 say about anyone who has come to faith in Jesus?

Verse 28 is powerful. It lists some of the cultural divisions that Paul saw in the world he lived in. How is this list similar to the one you just made?

Paul says that in spite of our differences if we believe in Christ, we all become united as one (vs. 28). What does this mean about how the Church should look compared to the world?

Do differences still cause you not to be united with other people in your youth group? What can you do to fight through these differences and be more united as a church?

WEEK ONE

DAY 4

What does it mean to be together in Christ? Read today's devotion for part 1 of the answer to this question.

Children are supposed to be treasured. Unfortunately, this isn't always the case. We live in a fallen world where children are sometimes abused and neglected. It's a tragic reality that hurts to think about. Part of why it hurts is because it's not supposed to be that way. Ideally, children bring laughter and joy to a home. Children are taken care of and looked after by parents. Children are sources of wonder and excitement to everyone around them. Chances are, if you have siblings, you have funny stories of something cute or crazy they have done. Kids have a special place in the life of a family.

What does it mean when the Bible says we are God's children? Because the Bible uses that language a lot. In fact, as we consider what it means to be "together" in Christ, one of the most prominent images is that of "children." Over and over again, the Bible talks about us becoming children of God when we come to saving faith in Christ. Let's look at a few places.

Read Romans 8:14-16. Here Paul compares the role of a slave to that of an heir (what Paul means when he says "sons" here.) Slaves were common in the Roman world. And certain kinds of slaves were considered members of a household. But the difference between a slave and an heir would be immense. Both were in the family, to some extent, but an heir had all the rights of the firstborn son. An heir was valued and loved and assured of a future. Kind of like how you are when God adopts you into His family.

1 John 3:1 says that God allowed us to become His children because He loved us. This opportunity to become a child of God's is open to all who come to saving faith in Him (John 1:12). The amazing thing is that the Church is a family where God is the Father and we are the children. All of us. Everyone who has ever believed in Jesus. WOW! What a family!

Read the following questions and consider what it means to be a child of God.

1. WHEN YOU THINK ABOUT BEING A CHILD OF GOD, WHAT COMES TO MIND?

2. WHAT ABOUT WHEN YOU THINK ABOUT GOD AS FATHER? WHAT EMOTIONS OR THOUGHTS DO YOU THINK OF WHEN YOU THINK ABOUT GOD AS A LOVING, CARING FATHER TO YOU?

3. HOW DOES IT CHANGE THE WAY YOU SEE YOUR CHRISTIAN FRIENDS WHEN YOU CONSIDER THAT YOU ARE ALL PART OF A BIG FAMILY?

4. WHAT DOES IT DO TO YOUR UNDERSTANDING OF THE CHURCH KNOWING THAT YOU ARE FAMILY MEMBERS WITH ALL OF THE BELIEVERS AROUND THE WORLD?

WEEK ONE

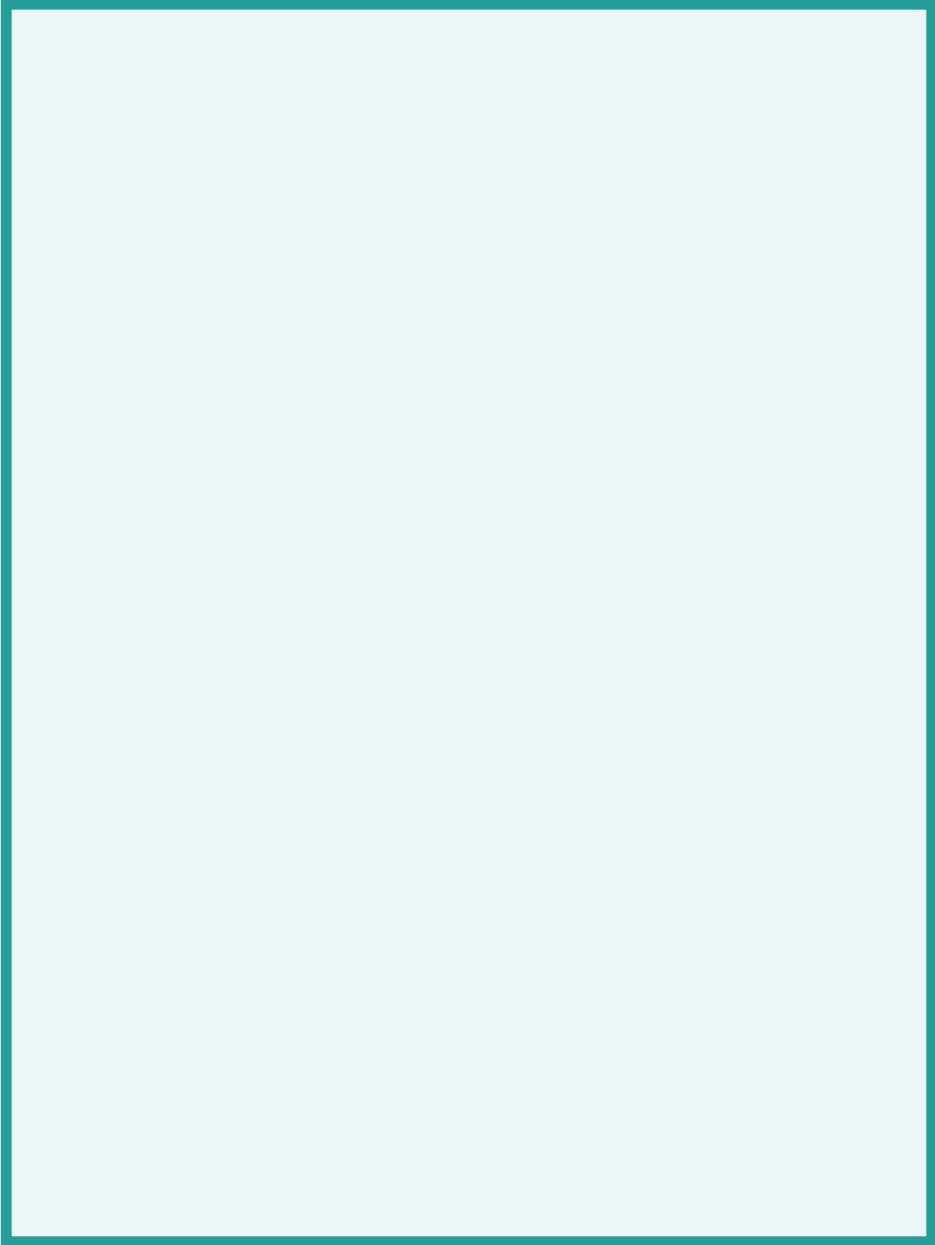
DAY 5

Today you'll get the chance to consider the second part of what it means to be together in God.

Take a moment and read Galatians 4:1-7. We're building on our theme of being adopted into the family of God. Go back and look at those last two verses. See where Paul says, "Abba! Father"? This is a Jewish term of endearment that you would have used for your earthly dad. It's not the same meaning as, say, "Dad," but it's close. It's a reverent but personal way of speaking to God.

This is HUGE! This would have been a major departure from the Old Testament understanding of how to address God. Essentially, Paul is saying that Jesus made a way for us to be in a personal, loving, tender relationship with God. Only through Christ can we address God in this way. It is an absolute game-changer when it comes to our faith.

Do you see that blank space on page 19? That's space for you to talk to your Father today in a way that maybe you haven't before. The idea is that you would use that space to write a letter to God as a child would to their loving father. Express yourself to Him. Thank Him. Praise Him. Pour your heart out. And do so knowing that you are His child, His adopted child, whom He loves dearly.



WEEK ONE

DAY 6

As we wrap up our first week of looking at what it means to be together, let's take one more look at the picture of togetherness God paints in the Bible.

Do you have any idea how big the family is you belong to? If you have come to saving faith with Jesus, you're a part of a family that stretches throughout time and is almost impossible to count. But God gave a prediction of this way back in the Old Testament.

Read Genesis 12:1-5. Do you remember this story? This is God calling Abram, who would later be called Abraham, to follow Him. Abraham would become the father of a great nation, the nation of Israel. In fact, there would be so many descendants that God said they would be like trying to count the stars in the sky (Genesis 15:5-6). In this specific moment, God was both talking about the Israelites and you. What? Yup. It's true.

You see, God knew that He would call a nation to Himself. The Israelites would be His special nation of people. He would give them the Law and the 10 Commandments, the beginnings of teaching a people to live according to His ways. But God also knew His people would ultimately need a Savior. God sent Jesus as a Jew to the Jews. Initially. But God knew all along that Jesus represented the means by which He would eventually call ALL people, anyone who would believe, to a relationship with Himself.

Now let's go back to the stars. God told Abraham that His descendants would be like the stars. God knew this meant Abraham's SPIRITUAL descendants as well. A couple of days ago you read Galatians 3:28-29. Recall, it says that you have come to saving faith in Jesus you are "Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise." Abraham didn't know it, but his offspring included you!

When God calls us into relationship with Him, He calls us to join a family that is almost immeasurable. Next time you feel like you're facing the world alone, remember, you are part of a worldwide, global group of people united together in their love of Christ. Let that encourage you!

WEEK ONE

DAY 7

TAKE TODAY OFF . . . YOU'VE EARNED IT.

If you want, reflect on some of what you have learned. Look back and identify one day in the week that really stood out to you.

What was it that was so meaningful?

Think about all the ways that God has changed you and how much more you will still be changed as you grow in Him. Listen and look for the ways He wants to speak to you today.