

TO GE TH ER

LIVING IN CHRIST-CENTERED COMMUNITY

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WHAT YOU'LL FIND IN THIS SAMPLE:

- A Sample of a Small Group Lesson Plan
- A Sample of the Student Book
- A short version of Together overviews showing the biblical passages covered throughout Together

Of course each of these components, and dozens more, are available to your teachers through their Online Lesson Manager. But this PDF will simply give you an idea of the main content of Together.

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TOGETHER

LIVING IN CHRIST-CENTERED COMMUNITY

What we want students to learn: That we are together because togetherness is God's plan for His people.

Scripture Focus: Ephesians 2:11-22

Supporting Scripture: Matthew 9:9-13

Session Snapshot: Together. It's a concept that is central to our understanding of what it means to be a Christ-follower. You see, God has always worked in and through community. It's crazy to think about, but God Himself has always existed in community (the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit). God's original vision for Eden was to populate a perfect existence with His creation, together with Him. God called a people to Himself, Israel, that understood their identity as a great togetherness; they were God's chosen people after all. The New Testament Church is an awesome picture of God growing His family, extending the offering of "togetherness" to all who would come to salvation through faith in Jesus, Jews and Gentiles alike. Your local church, and specifically your youth group, is an extension of God's intention to gather His people together. Your students were designed to be in community with each other. This lesson will help set the stage for your study of Together.

BIBLE BACKGROUND

The **Bible Background** is a focused, brief overview of some of the background info for the main passage you will be teaching.

THE DETAILS

- **Who wrote this book?** The Apostle Paul wrote the letters to the Ephesians. Of course, we know Paul as the one-time chief enemy of the Church. After his miraculous conversion on the road to Damascus, Paul would go on to have a position of great importance in the early Church and beyond. He wrote 13 of the 27 books of the New Testament.
- **When was it written?** Ephesians was probably written by Paul from prison in the latter years of his life, sometime around 60 or 61 AD.
- **What was the purpose for its writing?** Paul had a very close relationship with the church in Ephesus. It seems as if the motivation for the letter was simply that the church would know how he was faring in his imprisonment. But, true to form, Paul couldn't help but teach. The letter covers general teaching on the work of Christ to redeem believers, unity among believers, and how believers are supposed to conduct themselves.

THE MAIN POINT

The main point in this lesson is to look at how powerfully Paul talks about the unity that is made possible to all who come to saving faith in Jesus. By highlighting the traditional cultural differences between the Jews and Gentiles, Paul shines a spotlight on just how remarkable the unifying work of the Gospel is. The blood of Christ wasn't just shed for God's chosen people, the Israelites. It was for all people. And through faith in Jesus' work on the cross, all people are welcomed into one family: the Church.

**LIVING IN
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COMMUNITY****THE TAKEAWAY**

The takeaway from this lesson is to help your students see the Gospel's role in togetherness. If we were to answer the question, "Why did Jesus go to the cross," there are several valid responses. One of them would certainly be to make a way for all people to be welcomed into the family of God. The Gospel makes unity among all Christ-followers possible. It's a truth that we must challenge our students to embrace.

LESSON PLAN

The **Lesson Plan** contains three elements: An introductory activity called **Getting Started**; the Bible study section called **Digging In**; an application-focused segment called **Wrapping Up**.

GETTING STARTED

- **Student Book Pages**
 - This lesson will utilize pages 5-9 in the TOGETHER Student Book.
 - This activity will use page 5-6.
- **Additional Instructions**
 - Make sure students have something to write with.

FIRST, explain to your students that in this first activity, you're going to start by examining some groups of people who have traditionally been opposed to one another. Direct students' attention to page 6 in their Student Books. When they have found it, explain that what they are a few examples of groups who don't see eye-to-eye. Explain that there is some divisiveness in the group. Your job is to try and define exactly WHY there is disagreement.

THEN, ask students to consider your first group of opposed sides, "Cat People" vs. "Dog People." If you want, ask if anyone in the group would identify with one of these opposing sides. (If you want to add an extra element, have students get up and move to one side of your room depending on what "team" they identify with.) Then, lead a discussion where students attempt to pinpoint exactly why these two groups are opposed to one another. Have fun with this. If you can come to a consensus, write the reason down in the space provided between the two sides.

NEXT, proceed in this exact same manner for the other two examples provided: "Team Taylor" vs. "Team Katy," and "Pine-apple on pizza is delish" vs. "Who puts fruit on pizza?" Enjoy the discussion and have a lot of fun with this. There are two blanks provided for your team to come up with your own examples of groups that are divided. You could put opposing sports teams, musical interests, etc. The point is to have fun and highlight the disharmony between the two sides.

When you have finished, ask someone to read the Small Group Session 1 introduction from page 5. When he or she has finished, begin to transition to the **Digging In** section by saying something like:

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- As you might have guessed by now, we're going to be spending our time together talking about the concept of togetherness. There is a lot of "un-togetherness" in our world today, isn't there? We're going to see over the next few sessions that while there will always be discord outside of the church, God has created the Church as a place where there is great unity, great togetherness. Let's dig into Scripture and see where we see some of this talked about.

Ask if anyone has any thoughts or questions, then transition to *Digging In*.

DIGGING IN

- **Student Book Pages**
 - This activity will utilize pages 7-8 in the TOGETHER Student Book.
- **Additional Instructions**
 - You'll want to make sure students have something to write with, and a Bible or Bible app.

FIRST, give your students some context for the verses in Ephesians they are about to read. Use the Bible Background to give the details about who wrote the book and why. Then, say something like:

- **When we think about the Bible and what we know about culture in that time, there were two groups of people who were about as different as you could imagine: God's chosen people, the Jews, and non-Jews, what the Bible calls Gentiles. Let's take a second, and using what you've heard or studied before, let's see if we can come up with some reasons why Jews and Gentiles were so different from one another.**

Direct your students' attention to the section entitled, "Why So Different?" on page 7. Lead your group in a brief discussion about the differences between Jews and Gentiles. Encourage them to write their answers down as you will have the option to refer to it again. See if you can pull responses out of your students, even if they are not perfectly correct. Use the list below to help you guide and correct as needed:

- **Jews believed in one, true God. Most Gentiles, if they were religious at all, believed in multiple gods.**
- **Jews celebrated the festivals called for by the Law, such as Passover, Pentecost, Feast of Tabernacles, etc. These were all commanded by God in the Old Testament to be celebrated.**
- **There were dietary restrictions that Jews followed that Gentiles didn't.**
- **Other cultural issues included the Jews approach to sex and sexuality, worship, and so on.**

Make sure students grasp that these differences, and more, created a really profound difference between Jew and Gentile. It's actually hard for us to grasp just how pervasive it was. When you think you've made the point, begin to transition to the Bible Study. Encourage students to look out for the impact the Gospel had on the difference between Jew and Gentile.

THEN, have students turn to Ephesians 2. Have a volunteer read verses 11-12. Direct their attention to the heading "Part 1: At One Time . . . (vs. 2:11-12)." Ask students why they think this section might be titled this way. Then, lead them in a short discussion of the text. Ask:

- **Paul, a Jew used five phrases to describe what the life of a Gentile was apart from Christ. Can you spot them?**

**LIVING IN
CHRIST-CENTERED
COMMUNITY**

- o Answer: "separated from Christ," "alienated from the commonwealth of Israel," "strangers to the covenants of promise," "having no hope," and "without God in the world."
- **How would you sum up the Gentiles condition based on these descriptions?**
 - o Answer: Not good! Pretty hopeless.
- **Remember, we're talking about the differences that divided Jews and Gentiles. Why would these same descriptions not be accurate for the Jews?**
 - o Answer: The Jews were God's chosen people. God "created" the nation of Israel out of the promise He made to Abraham (Abram). God faithfully kept His covenant promise throughout the history of the Old Testament. God's plan of salvation in the Old Testament came through the Jewish nation. And while this doesn't mean all Jews were automatically "saved," it did mean that the message of salvation came through God's people.
- **Knowing that the Jews were God's chosen people and that there were thousands of years of animosity between Jews and Gentiles, how might some Jews have been tempted to view Gentiles, especially Gentile Christians?**
 - o Answers will vary. Point them back to Paul's description. Make sure to enforce the fact that culturally, there could still be a big rift between Jews and Gentiles, even within the church.

Explain to students that we can point to the reasons for the potential distance between Jews and Gentiles, and the differences this distance could create. It's no surprise given the history of Israel, their special place with God, and the fact that Christianity was really just coming into its own. But explain that what they are about to read speaks to the unifying power of the Gospel.

NEXT, instruct students to look at page 8 and direct their attention to the heading "Part 2: But Now In Christ . . . (vs. 2:13-18)." Have a volunteer read verses 13-18. When you have finished lead students in a brief discussion. Ask:

- **What is the visual Paul paints in verse 13? Can you see the picture in your mind?**
 - o Answer: Paul is helping us see that when Gentiles come to faith in Jesus, it is as if they were standing far apart from God and were suddenly brought very near.
- **What is the means of the Gentiles being brought close to God? And what exactly is Paul describing here?**
 - o Answer: Saving faith in Jesus' death on the cross made salvation available to the Gentiles in Ephesus. (And everywhere else, for that matter!)
- **Look at verses 14-15. Paul says that Jesus is the peace this world needs and that Jesus tore down the wall of hostility that divided Jews and Gentiles. One author has said that through Jesus, God made peace both "horizontal and vertical." What do you think this means?**
 - o Answer: Through Jesus, God not only made peace between Jews and Gentiles (horizontal), He made peace between humankind and Himself (vertical).
- **Think about what we just talked about, how there were very real differences between Jews and Gentiles. Look at the end of verse 15. What did Jesus do to these two different people groups?**
 - o Answer: He unified them! He made one "man" out of "two."
- **This is important, so important we'll ask it again. Look at verse 16. What was the means Jesus used to accomplish His mighty work of unity?**
 - o Answer: The cross.

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COMMUNITY**

Take a moment and really drive this point home. Through His death on the cross, Jesus put to death the division that was inherent in the relationship between Jews and Gentiles. This may seem insignificant today, but it's anything but. Say something like:

- **The Gospel was always intended for Jews and Gentiles alike. Always. But God had a plan, and that plan had a certain timetable. Jesus was always the Messiah who would be born as a Jew into the Jewish context and culture. But the transforming message of His love was always meant for all people. What Paul was helping his audience see was that the time had come. The time for division in the family of God was over. The Gospel message of reconciliation with God was for all people. Let's see how Paul talks about this.**

THEN, have a student look further down on page 8 to the heading entitled "Part 3: Together, God's Dwelling Place (vs. 2:19-22)." Have a student read verses 19-22. When he or she has finished, ask:

- **Whoa. Don't miss this. We just said that through Jesus, God crushed any hate between the Jews and Gentiles. But this seems to take it a step further. What does Paul say about the new identity made possible to Gentiles through Jesus' death on the cross?**
 - Answer: Not only is there no longer any division, but the Gentiles, who were once strangers are now welcomed members of the family of God. They have been adopted. Through saving faith in Jesus, they have become children of God.
- **Finally, Paul does something really cool. He teaches his audience about the Church, the people of God, using a metaphor. What metaphor, or word picture, does he use to describe the Church?**
 - Answer: Paul says that the growing number of Christ-followers are like a building being built, a temple, where the foundation is all who came before, and where Jesus is the cornerstone. Paul says we are like the bricks of the walls, all joining together to become a mighty dwelling place for God.

FINALLY, encourage your students to begin to tie this all together. Say/ask:

- **Let's think about this for a moment. Look back over at the way Paul described the Gentiles apart from Christ. Read those descriptions out loud. Now, compare those to the way Paul has just been talking about the Gentiles. There's a pretty big difference isn't there? Paul helps us see that within the body of people who have come to saving faith in Jesus, there is no room for division or hostility. Why? Because Jesus has destroyed all the reasons that might divide us. This is all because of the power of the Gospel. Through Jesus' death and resurrection, there a way was made for sin to no longer divide us and God, or us and others. Those who come to saving faith in Christ join a community, a family, of people who have also been brought near to Jesus. It is what true togetherness is all about. Let's spend another moment thinking about how this impacts our lives.**

If there are no questions or additional points to be made, transition to the *Wrapping Up* section of your lesson.

WRAPPING UP

- **Student Book Pages**
 - This activity will utilize page 9 in the TOGETHER Student Book.
- **Additional Instructions**
 - Make sure students have something to write with.

FIRST, ask students to consider for a moment some of the different categories or issues that divide people in our culture.

**LIVING IN
CHRIST-CENTERED
COMMUNITY**

Students will come up with a list that may vary based on their age and life experience. But help them see that divisions like race, ethnicity, gender, income level, and geography (where we live or are from) are some of the most divisive issues facing our culture. Guide them in fleshing out a list that helps them see some of the big-picture issues that divide people.

NEXT, bring it a little closer to home. Ask students for their thoughts on the types of issues or categories that divide people in their schools. Some of these will be the same as your previous list, though some may be different.

THEN, say something like the following:

- **If you're paying attention to the world around you, you've noticed the issues and divisions that come between various people. Many of the kinds of divisions we just mentioned are wrong. When we see categories like race and ethnicity, for example, used to discriminate against or divide people, that goes against God's will for His people. But there are many aspects of the world that go against God's ways. While it's still tough to watch, it's not surprising when people who don't know God don't act in godly ways. The real issue for us is when we see divisions in the church. What we've learned today is that God came to bridge the gaps of difference that can sometimes separate us. Jesus came to bring about a spirit of togetherness. That's His plan for His people.**

Direct students' attention to page 9 of their Student Book. Have someone read the quote on the page. When they have finished, help them unpack any of the words they might not understand, like "disparate" (different in kind) or "reconciliation" (the restoring of peace between two parties). Then, lead students in a brief discussion. Ask:

- **Someone summarize this quote for me. What is it saying?**
 - Answer: That in biblical times, the Gospel bridged the massive cultural gap between Jews and Gentiles, making a unified body out of previously hostile people groups. In today's times, the power of the Gospel still does the same thing.
- **If you were completely honest, would you say there are divisions in your youth group?**
 - Answers will vary.
- **If there are divisions, how do they make you feel? If you don't feel like there are significant divisions, why do you think this is so?**
 - Answers will vary.
- **Whether there are divisions or not, it is clear that as a local church, and as a youth group, we are called to be united by our faith in Jesus. We're all members of one family. Can you come up with a few practical things that our youth group can do to grow closer together?**
 - Answers will vary.

FINALLY, challenge students to begin to see their youth group, their local church, and the "big C" Church, the global body of believers in Jesus, as a big family. (That's exactly how God describes it!) Like any family, we won't always get along. But there is an underlying bond of love, the love for Jesus and the love for others Jesus births in us, that unites us. Encourage them to let this concept sink in and impact how they view their brothers and sisters in Christ.

Ask students if they have any questions or additional comments. Inform students of the devotions located on pages 35-41 in their Student Books. Provide them with a schedule or some structure as to when you would like for them to work through them. (The first devotion is on page 35.)

If there are no more questions, close in prayer for your group.

TO GE TH ER

LIVING IN
CHRIST-CENTERED
COMMUNITY

Published by: YM360

NAME

DATE

Look at the world around you. It seems like there is more division than there is unity. Some division is kind of silly. Some is life changing. Into this landscape, the Gospel speaks a profound truth: in Christ, we are united. We are together.

Look around you at your friends. At the people in your youth group. Are you unified with one another, regardless of your differences, by your common love for Christ? If you are, get ready to grow even closer. If not, you're about to get the opportunity to answer an important question: "Why not?"

HAVE YOU PREPARED FOR THE JOURNEY?

Ask yourself: Is my heart prepared to be challenged? Am I willing to be changed? If you can't answer "yes" to these questions, this journey might not be nearly as spectacular as it could be. If you need to, take a moment and silently talk to God in prayer. Ask God to radically move in your life.

YOU'RE HOLDING YOUR MAP

This book you're holding is the road map for your journey. It will help guide your experiences. Write your name and the date in the front. Hold on to it. You may want to look back and remember this time in your life.

LEARN. AND TEACH.

Keep your eyes and ears open for those valuable moments where God wants to teach you something. But don't miss the chance to teach your friends, and to be taught by them. Your friends are with you in this experience. Be open to what God is doing in and through them, and how He might be using them to speak to you. And vice versa.

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

ACTS 4:32

LARGE GROUP NOTES

SESSION 1

These two pages are designed for you to take notes on during Large Group Sessions. The stuff you're learning will really build on itself over the next few sessions. So even if you're not much of a note taker, you might want to at least jot down what you think is important.

TRY WRITING DOWN:

- Any specific teaching points
- Verse references for Scripture passages
- Quotes that make you think
- Anything you have a question about

SMALL GROUP INTRO

SESSION 1

Whether you like sports or not, they provide a great backdrop for one of our favorite kinds of stories: the comeback. There's nothing quite like a team rallying from behind with time expiring or the group of underdogs inexplicably coming back to beat the more talented team. Down three games to one in a seven-game series? No problem.

Do you know what makes a comeback possible even when all the odds are stacked against a team? The teams that come back when it looks impossible are ones where everyone is on the same page, and where everyone believes in the mission. It's amazing what's possible when people are all together.

Your church is intended to be the same way. The world around you is a place where people are constantly against one another. The world sees people in categories. Black. White. Rich. Poor. Good. Bad. This is the backdrop in which you do life. But the Church was never intended to be this way.

There is amazing power when you're all on the same page. When everyone is united, and on the same team, incredible results are possible.

This small group session will help you see exactly how your church is called to be unified, together, by your love for Jesus.

WHY SO MAD? Work with your group to suggest exactly what is the big problem between the groups listed.

SESSION 1

GETTING STARTED

**CAT
PEOPLE**

**DOG
PEOPLE**

**TEAM
TAYLOR**

**TEAM
KATIE**

**PINEAPPLE
ON PIZZA IS
DELISH**

**WHO PUTS
FRUIT ON
PIZZA?**

SESSION ONE

DIGGING IN

Work with your group to read the passages and answer the questions below.

WHY SO DIFFERENT?

PART 1: AT ONE TIME . . . (VS. 2:11-12)

Paul, a Jew, used five phrases to describe what the life of a Gentile looked like apart from Christ. Can you spot them?

How would you sum up the Gentiles' condition based on these descriptions?

Remember, we're talking about the differences that divided Jews and Gentiles. Why would these same descriptions not be accurate for the Jews?

Knowing that the Jews were God's chosen people, how might some Jews have been tempted to view Gentiles, especially Gentile Christians?

PART 2: BUT NOW IN CHRIST . . . (VS. 2:13-18)

What is the visual Paul paints in verse 13?

What actually brings the Gentiles close to God? What exactly is Paul describing here?

Look at verses 14-15. Paul says that Jesus is the peace this world needs, and that Jesus tore down the wall of hostility that divided Jews and Gentiles. One author has said that through Jesus, God made peace both "horizontal and vertical." What do you think this means?

Look at verse 16. Again, what was the means Jesus used to accomplish His mighty work of unity?

PART 3: TOGETHER, GOD'S DWELLING PLACE (VS. 2:19-22)

What does Paul say about the new identity made possible to Gentiles through Jesus' death on the cross?

What metaphor, or word picture, does Paul use to describe the Church?

Read this quote and respond to it with your group.

“THE CROSS OF CHRIST WHICH BROUGHT TOGETHER SUCH DISPARATE PEOPLES CAN SURELY BE THE MEANS OF RECONCILIATION FOR THOSE PRESENTLY DIVIDED BY ETHNICITY, NATIONALITY, UPBRINGING, ECONOMIC STATUS, OR ANY OTHER EARTHLY DISTINCTIONS THAT WRONGLY SEPARATE US.”

(ESV Gospel Transformation Bible, Crossway)

“FOR HE HIMSELF IS OUR PEACE, WHO HAS MADE US BOTH ONE AND HAS BROKEN DOWN IN HIS FLESH THE DIVIDING WALL OF HOSTILITY BY ABOLISHING THE LAW OF COMMANDMENTS EXPRESSED IN ORDINANCES, THAT HE MIGHT CREATE IN HIMSELF ONE NEW MAN IN PLACE OF THE TWO, SO MAKING PEACE, AND MIGHT RECONCILE US BOTH TO GOD IN ONE BODY THROUGH THE CROSS, THEREBY KILLING THE HOSTILITY.”

EPHESIANS 2:14-16

TO
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FOLLOW UP DEVOTIONAL JOURNAL

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THIS BOOK BELONGS TO: _____

DATE STARTED: _____

PUBLISHED BY YM360

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Together: Living Together In Christ-Centered Community
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Published by youthministry360 in the United States of America.

ISBN 13: 9781935832676
ISBN 10: 1935832670

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

ACTS 4:32

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Getting Started 6

WEEK ONE

Week 1 Intro 8
Day 1 10
Day 2 12
Day 3 14
Day 4 16
Day 5 18
Day 6 20
Day 7 21

WEEK TWO

Week 2 Intro 22
Day 1 24
Day 2 26
Day 3 28
Day 4 30
Day 5 32
Day 6 34
Day 7 35

WEEK THREE

Week 3 Intro 36
Day 1 38
Day 2 40
Day 3 42
Day 4 44
Day 5 46
Day 6 48
Day 7 49

WEEK FOUR

Week 4 Intro 50
Day 1 52
Day 2 54
Day 3 56
Day 4 58
Day 5 60
Day 6 62
Day 7 63

Wrapping Up 64
About the Author 66

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.

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.**

INTRO

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.

WEEK ONE

DAY 1

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?

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.

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

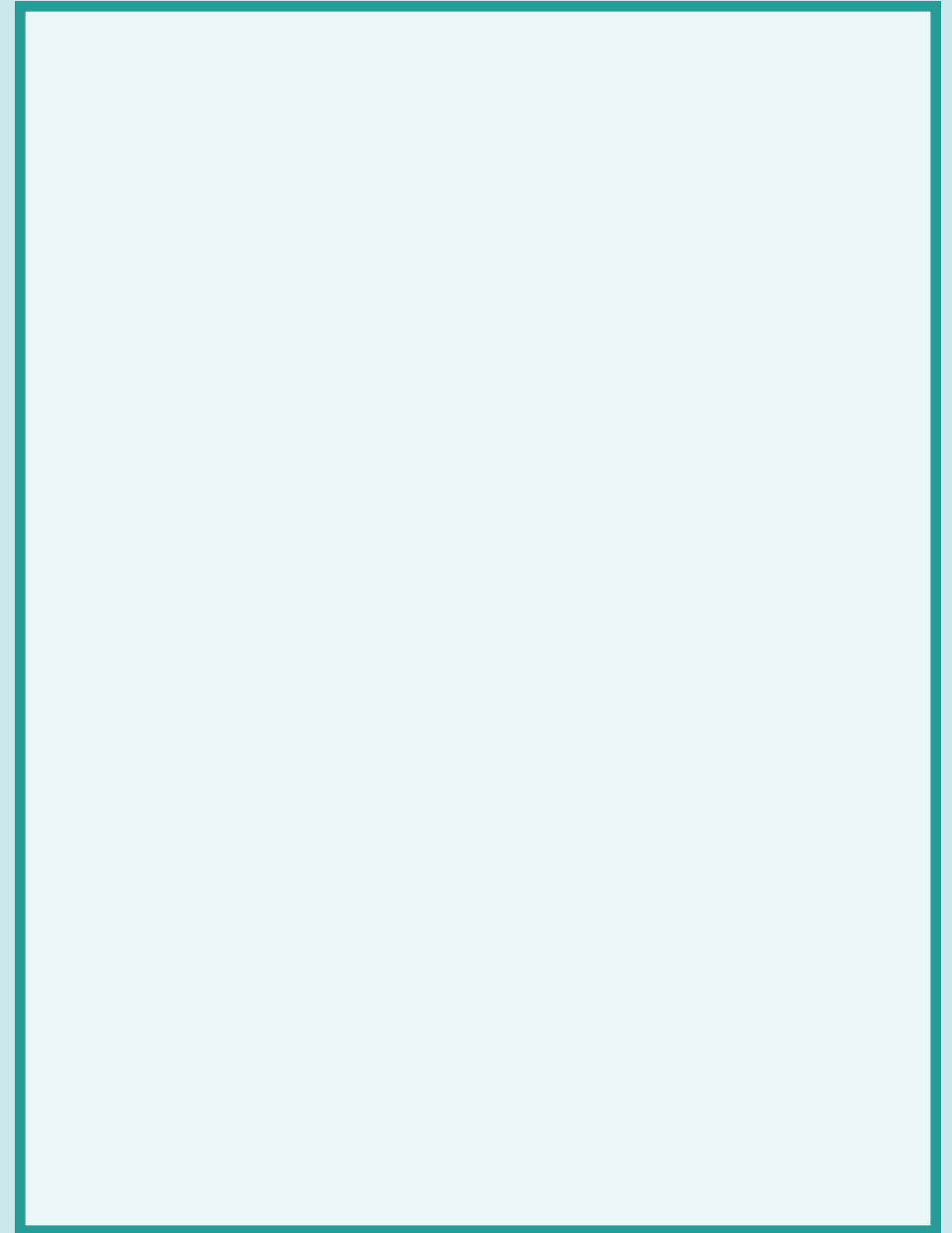
DAY 5

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.

Together: Living Together in Christ-centered Community

“Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul . . .” - Acts 4:32

Look around you. In our culture today, there is more division than there is unity. Some division is trivial. Some is life changing. And yet, into this landscape, the Gospel speaks a profound truth: in Christ, we are united. We are together.

Do your students know the difference between friendship and fellowship? Are your students unified with one another, regardless of their differences, by their common love for Christ? Is your youth ministry a safe place where students feel valued and cared for? Do your students lead out into culture, as one, motivated by the mission of advancing the Gospel?

If you want to help your students live out their answers to these questions, then TOGETHER is for you. Teach TOGETHER and challenge your students to embrace a Christ-centered community.

Small Group Outlines

The small group times in *Together* work in perfect concert with the Large Group outlines. Each Small Group session builds on the corresponding theme of the Large Group Outline.

Session 1: Togetherness Is God’s Plan

What We Want Students to Learn: That we are together because togetherness is God’s plan for His people.

Main Scripture: Ephesians 2:11-22

Session Snapshot: Together. It’s a concept that is central to our understanding of what it means to be a Christ-follower. You see, God has always worked in and through community. It’s crazy to think about, but God Himself has always existed in community (the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit). God’s original vision for Eden was to populate a perfect existence with His creation, together with Him. God called a people to Himself, Israel, that understood their identity as a great togetherness; they were God’s chosen people after all. The New Testament Church is an awesome picture of God growing His family, extending the offering of “togetherness” to all who would come to salvation through faith in Jesus, Jews and Gentiles alike. Your local church, and specifically your youth group, is an extension of God’s intention to gather His people together. Your students were designed to be in community with each other. This lesson will help set the stage for your study of *Together*.

Session 2: Togetherness Runs Deep

What We Want Students to Learn: That being together is more than physically being with each other. It’s being emotionally invested in one other.

Main Scripture: John 13:34-35

Supplemental Scripture: Galatians 6:1-2; Acts 2:42-45

Session Snapshot: We are called to love one another. In fact, Jesus said that the world would be able to look at us and know that we were different simply because of how Christians cared for each other. Jesus made this statement to His disciples mere hours before He was arrested. Elsewhere in Scripture, we see how this love is supposed to look. We'll focus on two specific areas in this lesson, helping your students understand exactly what it looks like to love each other as brothers and sisters in Christ.

Session 3: The Purpose of Our Togetherness

What We Want Students to Learn: That our togetherness has a purpose. It's drawing people close to Jesus . . . together.

Main Scripture: Matthew 28:18-20

Supplemental Scripture: Ephesians 4:11-16

Session Snapshot: We don't come together in our churches simply to hang out together. While fellowship is a key part of the togetherness of the Church, it's not the only part. Part of being together as a Body of Believers is drawing people closer to Christ. Sometimes, this means bringing people into our communities who do not know Jesus at all. This also means that we're supposed to be working together to bring each other deeper in our relationship with Jesus. Call it togetherness with a purpose. The Church is God's plan to both introduce Himself to the lost, and to grow closer with His children. This lesson will examine what the Bible says about this, and how we might practically go about doing this.

Session 4: Truly Together

What We Want Students to Learn: That God's plan for us is to be united by our love for Jesus, regardless of our differences. Together means together.

Main Scripture: Acts 4:32-34

Supplemental Scripture: Ephesians 4:1-3

Session Snapshot: When we come to faith in Christ we join a family. We call this family the Church. We are joined together with the global (and historical) body of all who believe in Jesus. But more importantly, for our purposes, we're joined together with a local congregation. We call this our church family. And like any family, there are times we may not see eye-to-eye with each other. If we expand this definition of family to the believers in our community, or our State, we can quickly see how even more differences of opinion may arise. And yet, we are called by God to be united in our purpose and mission. While we won't always share the same opinions, we must work to foster a sense of unity, a sense of *togetherness*, in light of our shared love for Jesus. That's the challenge this lesson will issue to your students.