

# COMMUNITY | Romans 12:9-21

Chaz Holsomback

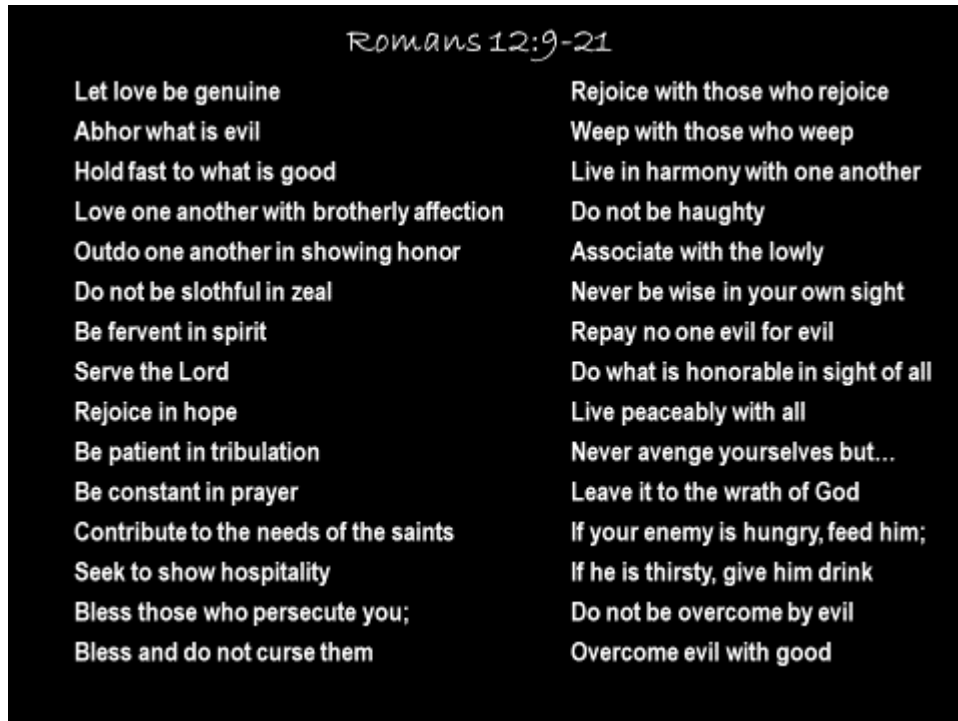
Over the last couple of years, there has been a lot of talk about “community.” It’s trendy. It’s a buzz word. It’s everywhere. Apparently, we want community. We desire community. Our society values community. Advertisers use it to market products. Politicians use it to garner support. Cities talk about creating community through work projects and public services. Countless television shows tell stories of unlikely communities and the people that make them up- This Is Us, The Good Place, Parks and Rec, COMMUNITY— that’s just one network folks. We have community coffee, community beer, community clothing brands, and we are literally sitting in Mockingbird “Community” Church, right now. Which, BTW, no one pushes the “community” agenda more than the church. Earlier this year, one New York Times article said it like this:

“There are fan communities, hobbyist communities, communities for users or enthusiasts of every consumer product imaginable. Every interest, every circumstance and point of identification, it seems, benefits by gathering under this feel-good umbrella word, which instantly puts a friendly gloss on every activity. People who interact are a community. People who don’t interact but share some quality or belief become a community. People who are lumped into communities by other communities are communities. “Community” makes everything sound better. It makes “the activist community” sound approachable; it makes “the skin-care community” sound important; it makes “the Christian community” sound inclusive and kind; it makes “the medical community” sound folksy and skilled at the bedside; it makes “the homeless community” sound voluntary; it makes “the gun rights community” sound humanistic; it makes “the tech community” sound like good citizens.”

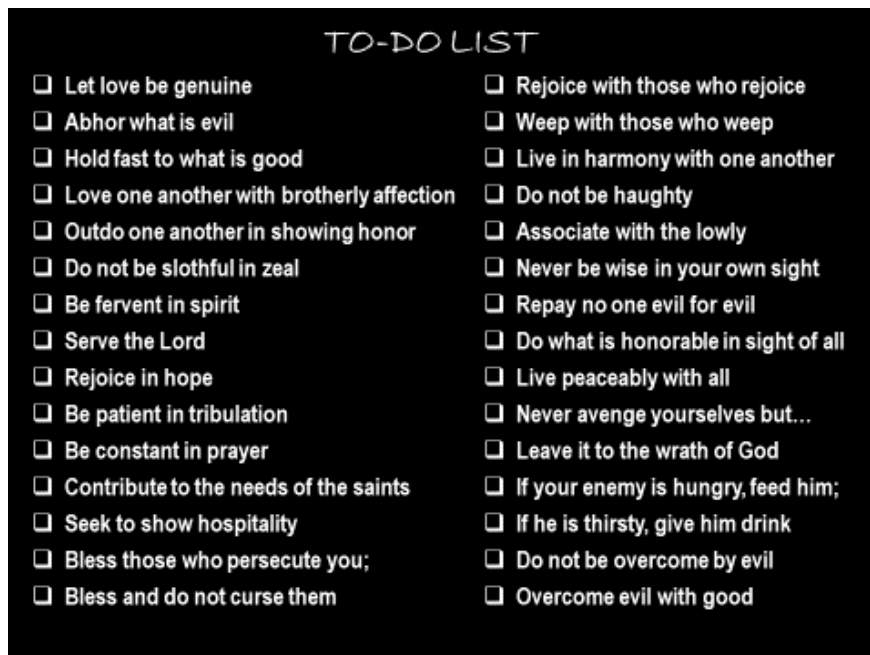
But with all this community talk, is community really happening? I mean, is community the sum of buying the right products, managing our brand, voting for the right candidate, watching the right television show, joining the right club, going to the right park, drinking the right coffee, drinking the right beer, wearing the right clothes and \*\*\*GASP\*\*\* attending the right church? Probably not.

So how does community happen? What is community anyways? And, more importantly, what is Christian community in and through Jesus Christ? Well, I'm glad you guys have been wondering and asking such questions, because, today, we are going to attempt to answer them.

Let's begin with a closer look at our text from Romans 12 that was read a few moments ago. Perhaps this is a good place to start when asking the what and how of faithful, Christian community.



Wow! Look at all those imperatives! Looks like a to-do list doesn't it?

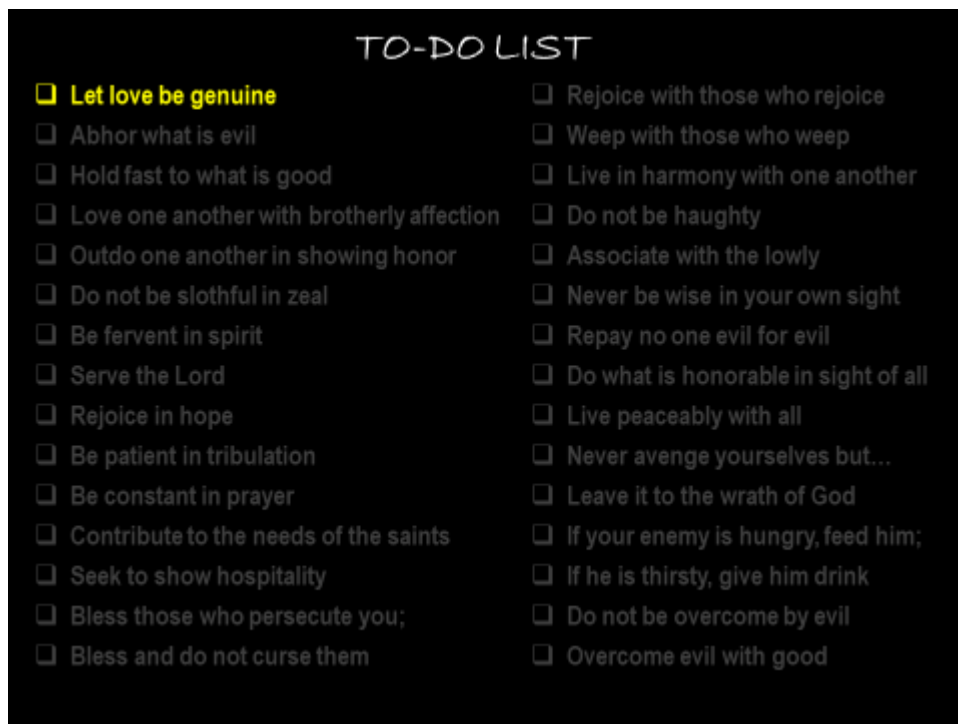


One after another, we are called, urged, asked, instructed, commanded... Have you ever heard someone say something like, "I don't want a 'check list' Christianity?" Like, when we live out our faith, we shouldn't just be checking the box. That would be inauthentic, or legalistic, or whatever... Now, I know what people are trying to get at when they say stuff like this, but... I want to suggest that if we really looked at this list, it seems like Paul is suggesting that this is a pretty good place to start when it comes to checking boxes.

Surely, this is better than what most of us are doing to avoid "checking the box." WHICH IS NOTHING. So, for what it's worth, I'm here to tell you that if you need some boxes to check... start here. (I know some of you are freaking out right now, and that's ok we'll come back to this, so hang tight. More on checking the boxes later.)

So, here's where we're going. First, I want to look at just a few items from this list. (We won't get to all of them, we'll just pick a few). Then I have a brief video for us to watch together. (You guys know I love video illustrations.) Then, we'll receive communion together. Cool?

First up on our list, "Let love be genuine"



Have you ever been given knock off cologne or perfume? Or maybe you've bought it yourself. (I know no one in this room would ever do something like this.) Let's pretend one of your crazy uncles, or an

aunt or something bought it for you for Christmas. The box, the bottle, all of the packaging would look genuine. If you were to spray some into the air, and give it a whiff, it would smell like the real thing—it would smell genuine. But, if you've ever actually worn knock off fragrances before you know that two things can potentially happen: First, knock off fragrances never last as long as the real thing.

Something about them loses their scent super quick. They don't hold up. Second, sometimes, and this is worse, knock off fragrances CHANGE after they mix with the oils of your skin, or the fabric of your clothes, and even the natural odors in the air. And they start to stink. It's subtle, but it's there. A few hours later you notice it. Love, is a lot like cologne or perfume. It needs to be genuine. A fake, a knock off, just won't do. Look, if you think this is a dumb illustration... It's in the Bible:

#### 2 Corinthians 2:15

For *we are a fragrance* of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing.

#### Ephesians 5:1-2

Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; and *walk in love*, just as *Christ also loved you* and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God *as a fragrant aroma*.

Our love needs to be genuine. It needs to be real. Otherwise, it fades, it wears off, it loses its fragrance. Or worse... It starts to stink. Diedrich Bonhoeffer, in his book *Life Together* says this:

Those who love *their dream* of a Christian community more than the Christian community itself become destroyers of that Christian community even though their personal intentions may be ever so honest, earnest, and sacrificial... Those who dream of this idealized community demand that it be fulfilled by God, by others, and by themselves. They enter the community of Christians with their demands, set up their own law, and judge one another and even God accordingly.'

You see, our ideas, our feelings, our hopes and our dreams about what a perfect community should look like, does not make our love genuine. *Genuine love must originate from the love we have each*

*received in Jesus.* But, genuine love is not some idealized, esoteric, abstract concept achieved in “the heavenly places” only. It is earthy, grounded in real life. Genuine love (and therefore community) cannot be divorced from real-life. Genuine love takes place in the everyday realities of work, laundry, family emergencies, aging parents, interruptions, newborns, diaper changes, financial difficulties, inclement weather, illness, getting the kids to school, getting them to soccer practice, getting them to sleep at a decent hour... paying bills, do I need to go on? Genuine love not only takes into account the new birth in Christ experienced by each member of your community, but their history and their personality and—gets this—the sin that still lurks within them. May God help us, may our love be genuine.

List item #2:



We won't spend a lot of time on this, but I feel like it's worth mentioning. That little phrase “abhor what is evil. Hold fast to what is good.” Paul isn't saying, “Hey, have a preference for the good. Or an opinion against evil.” It's not a mere distaste for evil in the same way you don't like black coffee or Brussel sprouts. Paul is saying, HATE EVIL. LOATHE IT. ABHOR IT. I wonder what kind of implications this should have on our lives and the media we consume, the activities we participate in and the what we find funny; or how we relate to sin, not out there, in society, or in other people, but in here... in us, in me. Jesus said, “If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For

it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell.” Do I hate the evil in me like that? Do you?

Ok, moving on. List item #3:



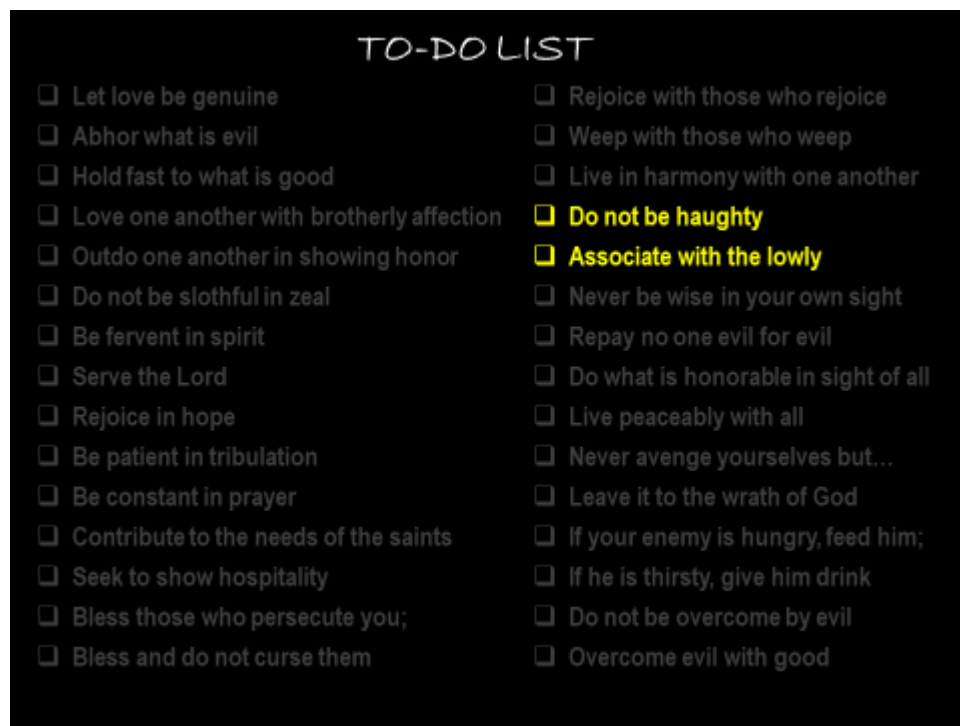
Love one another with brotherly affection. In other words, love one another as if you are a family. Now, I know we talk about this at CCC a lot. And I know you're probably tired of hearing about it... but I think there are still some things that could be said here. First, I realize not all of us come to the table with the same picture of family. Some of us had stable, emotionally mature, God-loving, faithful families growing up, and we define "family" using those terms. Others of us, had erratic, dysfunctional, emotionally detached families growing up, and we can't help but define family using those terms. Let me just say, that wherever you are at on that spectrum, whatever your family life was like growing up, or is currently... that when it comes to the church as family, *it is neither of those examples and it is both*. Just think about that for a moment.

Second, what do families do together? Families eat, play, work, plan, budget, celebrate, grow, mourn, grieve, and struggle; and maybe the hardest thing for us... families REST together. In other words, *families "do nothing" together. They just ARE together.*

Third, for better or for worse, *you don't choose your family*. I remember a few years ago, Jeremy and I visited a local community here in the area that was considering joining CCC. I remember as we were leaving, one of the guys from their group started asking us about Christ City's values and how we try to live out our faith together and what it looks like in practice. And at some point, (and I don't remember how we got here or why exactly I said it) I said, "I don't get to choose my friends anymore." I'll never forget the look on his face. (The same look is on some of your faces right now actually). But, let me explain what I mean. Look, I get it, some of you "chose" CCC from a pool of potential options, but now that you're here, the invitation is to commit to church like a family. And listen, that would be true if you were going to The Village, or Fellowship, or Park Cities Baptist, or All Saints or any other church. The invitation in scripture, the invitation for the Christian is always to commit to a local community of believers as family.

Think about this: *Would you relate to Christ City differently if it was the only church in town? How would that change how you relate to the people sitting next to you right now?*

List item #4:

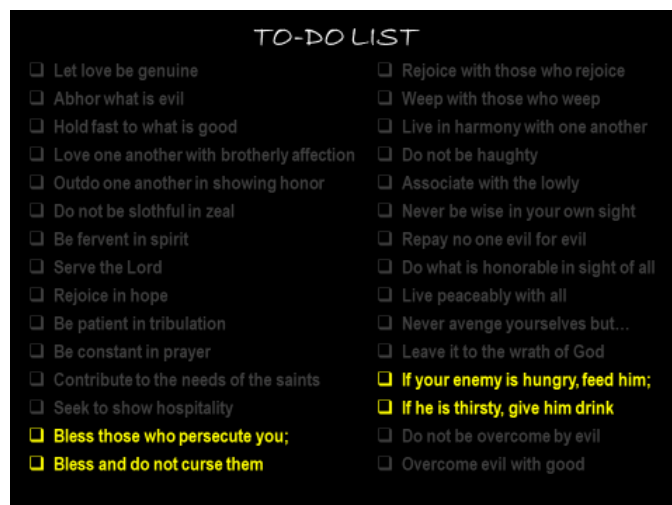


Do not be haughty but associate with lowly. Let's do a quick experiment. I want you to think about a typical day in your life. Where do you go? Who do you interact with? My guess, is for most of us, we go to the same half a dozen places, interact with the same half a dozen people, and for the most part,

all of these places and all of these people look the same, have roughly the same amount of social mobility, economic stability, and are roughly speaking in the same social class as we are. So let me ask you: *if you only ever go to the same places where people of your social status, income and class go, how then, will you ever associate with the lowly?* Listen, we need to do a better job of this at Christ City Church. Now, of course I don't know all of you, and I don't know all of you spend your time and resources, but I know that I feel like God has much, much, more for us in this area.

Our GC has recently tried to take some tangible action in this direction, last Saturday, we spent about two hours out serving the homeless with coffee, and donuts, and breakfast sandwiches—to be clear, nothing magical happened. I don't remember any parting of the waters, we didn't see a revival breakout. We simply tried to “associate” with some people that would be considered “lowly.” You do know that's who Paul is talking about right? He's not speaking metaphorically here. He's not saying, “lowly” people are those who are materially wealthy, but have corrupted worldviews. He's not talking referring to your neighbor with a MBA who makes 6 figures but doesn't know Jesus. He's not talking about people who are “lowly” in some metaphoric spiritual sense, he's doesn't mean like, “poor in spirit” or “impoverished in soul.” He is talking about poor people. Sick people. Marginalized people. People on the fringe. People who have been cast aside and overlooked. People who are “low” in the social hierarchy. Anyways, towards the end of our time on Saturday one of the guys we met, his name was Cory, asked me, “Did God make you do this?” To be honest, I didn't have a very good answer at the time. I don't really remember what I said. I have since thought about it and I wish I would have said, “God didn't make us do this. *God made us want to.*” I think probably more than anything else, that's the point I want to make here. Paul says to the Roman church, and to us “associate with the lowly.” Do you even want to?

Which kind of leads to the next few items on our list:





“Bless those who persecute you. Bless and do not curse them.” “If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink.” Apparently, Paul assumed we would be in the midst of enemies—not sequestered to some church enclave or Christian ghetto. Check this out, Martin Luther, one of the reformers wrote this:

'The kingdom is to be in the midst of your enemies. And he/she who will not suffer this does not want to be of the Kingdom of Christ; he wants to be among friends, to sit among roses and lilies, not with the bad people but the devout people. O you blasphemers and betrayers of Christ! If Christ had done what you are doing who would ever have been spared' - Luther

Yeah, I'm just going to leave that right there...

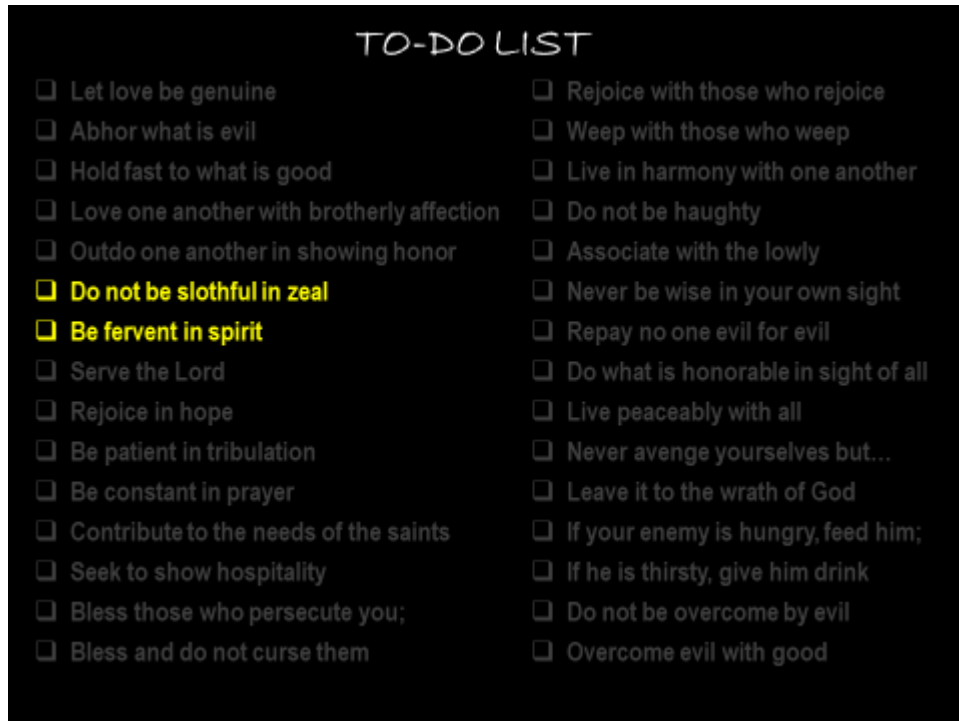
Moving right along...List item #6:



Never be wise in your own sight. I've noticed something about our church. We sometimes look at other ways of living out the Christian faith—the way people serve the city, the way they “do church,” the rhythms they have and the values they hold—with a bit of condescension. It's as if we look at them and say, “Oh how cute, you still have Sunday school. You still serve at the soup kitchen once a

month? You have a men’s ministry. Isn’t that nice.” Guys, this won’t do. If we are going to poke fun at someone, we need to poke fun at ourselves.

Next on our list:



Do not be slothful in zeal. Be fervent in spirit. Some of you may have read the [Weekly Resource](#) that posted this past Monday talking about this section of Romans 12. The title was “Don’t Be Lazy.” That about sums it up. Christian community, genuine love, brotherly affection, association with the lowly—none of it happens by accident. You have to work at this stuff. You have to be intentional with your time, your resources, with your life. Look, I know some of you moved to Dallas and didn’t know anyone, so it is has been super easy for you to be intentional with your church family—because you don’t have any other friends! Praise God for you! I also know some of you however, have to work really hard at this, because you have lots of friends who don’t call CCC home, and your spread pretty thin... you need to integrate some of your relationships.

I know none of this is easy. That’s why Paul says don’t be lazy in pursuing these relationships. About a week or so ago, Amber and I had dinner with a family from our gospel community that illustrates some of what I’m getting at. Without going into detail, as we had dinner, we also had a somewhat awkward conversation that involved some hurt feelings, some misunderstandings, like people were kind of mad at each other... But because both families were committed to each other, because both

families are committed to being a family, because both families were not slothful in zeal, but fervent in spirit, we worked it out... together. We're still working it out. I'm convinced that you know you are approximating genuine, loving, community, when you can argue and disagree, and even fight, WITH and FOR each other. You have to go "through" not around, to get to the good stuff. You have to go through the difficulty, the awkwardness, the tension, the miscommunications and misunderstandings. You have to go through, not around.

And this brings us to the final item we'll consider from our list:



Live in harmony with one another. This little phrase, "live in harmony" is interesting. I don't know Greek. But I do know how to use Logos Bible Word study software. The word here for harmony is *phroneo*. The Greek word used here has many meanings...it can mean to think, to feel, to have understanding, to agree, to direct one's mind to a thing, to seek, to strive for. But you really have to work to find it translated "harmony." The only other time it is translated this way, comes later in Romans 15:4-6,

May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to *live in such harmony (phroneo)* with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

So, with all of this in mind—harmony, with one voice, glorifying God—I want to show you a video that illustrates what we have been talking about today. The scriptures give us the metaphors of temple, body and family for describing the church. But rarely does it give us the metaphor of harmony, music and symphony when talking about the church. And you know I'm the music guy right? So of course I'm going to capitalize on this.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a23945btJYw&authuser=1>

I just think this a perfect picture of the church. Everyone is involved, everyone is playing, there may be some missed notes here and there, there may be places where we forget the note, or lose the tempo, but the song continues, we keep singing our song, playing our music, in spite of every mistake, every wrong note, we keep living in harmony. And the world takes notice! The world watches, and rejoices and, in God's providence, some of those who watch, join in and sing along. The whole thing is absolutely beautiful. A beautiful picture of the church. Friends, this is a picture of how evil is overcome by good.

But... it's also a beautiful picture of the Gospel. Did you see who started the whole thing? It was a child. Right. This is the Christian story. The Christian hope. The Christian song. In just a few weeks we will enter the season of Advent and for four weeks we will celebrate the birth of a child, the birth of a Savior. The birth of a child who started singing the song that millions of people are still singing around the world today. The song that you and I are invited to sing. The harmony of our faith, of our lives, of our love.... of our community.

But, as most of us know, this isn't always our experience of community. Most of us know, that when we look at this check list, this to-do list, we fail. We become overwhelmed, or discouraged because it is all soooo hard, so difficult. If we can be honest, we can admit that Paul's outline of Christian community seems a bit unrealistic, a bit farfetched, a bit idealistic. That's because, apart from Christ... it is.

Remember the Greek word from before? *Phroneo*? In Philippians it gets rendered a bit differently—it's used three times here, Paul writes :

So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit,

but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, **which is yours in Christ Jesus**

And there it is. The good news. All of this, everything we have been talking about, the community that we long for, the community we hope for... Paul says, **“it is already yours in Christ Jesus.”**

Remember our to-do list?



IT'S DONE! In Jesus, it's all done. The boxes are checked!



Bonheoffer again, for the win:

'Because God already has laid the only foundation of our community, because God has united us in one body with other Christians in Jesus Christ long before we entered into common life with them, we enter into that life together with other Christians, not as those who make demands, **but as those who thankfully receive....**'

And so, that is how we will end this afternoon. Receiving. Receiving the gift of community. The gift of genuine love. The gift of one another. The gift of Jesus Christ as we come to the table to receive the bread and cup.

Here's how we'll end our time. Break into groups of 4 or 5. I want you to receive communion FIRST. After everyone has the communion elements, have one person say a quick prayer of thanks and then receive the bread and juice TOGETHER. Then, only after you have received communion, take a few moments, and share with those in your group one item from our list that you are committing to over the next week or so.



Just pick one and share it. We are doing this AFTER we receive communion to remind us that all of the boxes are already checked in Jesus, that his life is now our life, that in Jesus, the community of the church is already realized, is already accomplished, and we are called to simply live into what is already true about us and our community in and through Jesus Christ.