

This Bible study was created by Harvest Bible Chapel in Chicagoland,
under the leadership of Founding and Senior Pastor James MacDonald.

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GROUP STUDY

**UNCOMMON
COMMUNITY**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

3	Acknowledgements
4	A Word from Pastor James MacDonald
7	Session 1: You Are Not an Island
19	Session 2: Love One Another
31	Session 3: Forgive One Another
43	Session 4: Serve One Another
53	Session 5: Submit to One Another
65	Session 6: Encourage One Another
75	Session 7: Be Devoted to One Another
86	A Final Charge from Dr. Garrett Higbee
88	Appendix: Prayer Requests
90	Appendix: Small Group Discussion Questions
98	Appendix: Social Covenant
100	Appendix: Small Group Contract
102	Appendix: Ten Attributes of Uncommon Community
103	End Notes

A WORD FROM PASTOR JAMES MACDONALD

It's time to reclaim a word that's been misused and trivialized for far too long.

Fellowship.

Contrary to what some may think, fellowship isn't red punch and cookies in the church basement. It also isn't something that happens after the service when people stand around in conversation. Nor is it "We're having Bill and Sheila over after church to watch the Bears' game and have some fellowship."

Those can all be good, but they aren't what the Bible is talking about when it uses *fellowship* to describe the force that was critical in holding the early church together, as "**they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship...**" (Acts 2:42).

The truth is, some of the deepest joys in life flow from the life-giving activity of biblical fellowship. But too many among us aren't experiencing it often enough with their small groups. And it's not going to happen over mere chitchat or an occasional potluck.

We're taking back fellowship—and that starts with understanding what the word really means. **Fellowship is active participation in a common**

interest. Another way to think of it is this simple phrase...

Uncommon community.

It's all about living *for* and *with* one another. And it involves a level of interdependence and transparency that the world has no idea how to attain.

Fellowship leaves appearances at the door and goes for authenticity—over the long haul. It's easy to stay at the surface, or to simply withdraw when we get uncomfortable. But the greater glory is given to Jesus Christ when we pursue and persevere in relationships based on Him.

And as we continue to press on in life and grow in love together, we will experience something amazing, that only God can do.

So, no more anonymity or superficial friendships. Let's commit to pursuing "uncommon community" in our church, and discover what it means to live in fellowship—together.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Pastor James". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial 'J'.

Pastor James



SESSION

1

YOU ARE NOT AN ISLAND

AT HOME

MEMORIZE

Proverbs 18:1

Whoever isolates himself seeks his own desire; he breaks out against all sound judgment.

Introduction

We are a fast society and an efficient society, but we are not a relational society. Our culture is set up for isolation. We wear ear buds when we exercise. We communicate via email and text messages. We enter and leave our houses through gates and garages. Our mantra: “I leave you alone. You leave me alone.”

Gilligan's Island, a 1960 television sitcom, lived out the reality of this mantra. The story follows seven castaways who attempt to survive alone on an island. In one of the episodes, the central character, Gilligan, tried to isolate himself even more. After having his feelings hurt, he selfishly decided to move away from the other six survivors to the opposite side of the island. There he sat alone in a cave. Not surprisingly, this became a miserable existence for Gilligan. He was alone and lonely. Think about that. He was already a castaway on an island, but he found a way to separate himself further.

Remarkably, life became miserable for everyone else on the island, too. Without Gilligan, there was a terrible void. They missed him at the dinner table. They longed for his jokes, his laughter, his gentleness. They even missed his clumsy mistakes.

That's how selfishness works. It separates us, not only from those we love but also from the God who loves us. Selfish living destroys relationships. Selfish living restricts the grace God longs to pour into your life. Selfish living isolates us.

Back from the commercial break, the show continues with each character, one-by-one, deciding they were wrong and humbly seeking Gilligan to reconcile. By the end of the episode, all seven people are together again on the other side of the island in Gilligan's cave.

Though the episode was made for laughs, how many times do we see this happen in real life with tragic results? How many husbands escape from their relationally-starving family to the isolation of their man cave? How many people appear gracious and kind, but live every day for their own pleasure? How many boast of hundreds of Facebook friends, but have no real face-to-face friends?

Isolation is our human instinct, yet God wants His people to be the exception. Let everyone else go the way of secluded and solitary living. God's followers will be a people of community. Though sin drives us to remove ourselves from each other, God calls us to enter in with each other. Sin promotes our self-destructive independence. God longs for our soul-nourishing interdependence. We don't just need others; we are created for one another!

READ

1 Corinthians 12:12-27

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.

For the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, yet one body.

The eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you,” nor again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.” On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together. Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.

KNOW

1. If you had to give up one of your senses (sight, smell, taste, touch, or hearing), which would you choose to be without? How would it change your life to be without this “body part”?

2. How does the body illustration in this passage transfer to our interactions within the church?

3. What does Paul, the author of this passage, say to demonstrate that God designed the members of the body of Christ to be interdependent, mutually relying on each other, rather than independent, self-sufficient and free from outside interaction?

4. What does it mean when the passage says, “The parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable”? What examples illustrate this observation?

STUDY

As children in God’s family, we belong to each other and we need each other. God doesn’t want His children to live in isolation. This is one reason Jesus Christ established His church on earth: it is a living fellowship in which His children can worship Him united, witness His grace, and encourage one another in the truth. The word *community* means “to have in common,” and the children of God have much in common. They share the same life, the same Word, the same love for Christ, the same concern for a lost world, and the same desire to glorify God. This idea of living for one another is emphasized throughout Scripture. In fact, the phrase *one another* is used over forty times in the New Testament.

One of the first symptoms of a weakening relationship with the Father is a believer’s carelessness about relationships with God’s people. “**Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together**” is a commandment from God (Hebrews 10:25), and we should obey it. Little do we realize the destructiveness of isolation. It results in the detriment of others, the weakening of our relationship with God, and to the impoverishment of our own life.

The first Christians realized the danger of being alone, so they **“devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers”** (Acts 2:42). The blessings of living in authentic community were recognized by Solomon, one of the wisest men to ever live: **“Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow. But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up! Again, if two lie together, they keep warm, but how can one keep warm alone? And though a man might prevail against one who is alone, two will withstand him—a threefold cord is not quickly broken”** (Ecclesiastes 4:9-12).

If you haven’t realized it yet, this is the point—the Christian life is not an individual sport! Uncommon community means we are connected to one another, and it defines how we interact with one another. Uncommon community involves sharing ourselves with others. The foundation for real fellowship with God and man is to live out in the open with both.

BE

5. Why is it so easy for us to live life alone? What keeps us from intentional interaction with other people?

6. Think of a time when you felt a deep sense of belonging among a group of believers. What were the contributing factors to that belonging? What made the interaction so special?

7. First Corinthians 12 warns against any part of the body considering itself either less important or more important than the others. How have you been tempted to think of yourself as either more or less important?

Over the next several sessions, we will dig deeper into what it means to do life together. This is what we call “uncommon community,” and we believe it is defined by the “one anothers” in Scripture: Love one another. Forgive one another. Serve one another. Submit to one another. Encourage one another. Be devoted to one another.

DO

8. Living together is not always easy, but we are parts of the same body. In light of that, where do you see a need for growth in “one another” living?

9. Are you a selfish person? In what relationships are you tempted to be self-centered?

10. In what situations are you tempted to seek isolation and independence when instead you should be seeking community and interdependence? How can you grow your interdependence on other church members?

11. Since you are an important member of the body of Christ, what are you doing to help the body of Christ function more effectively? How is your participation in our body “indispensable” to our body? How is our church “indispensable” to you?

PRAY

Father, I am Yours. Let me not find my identity in what I do or the title I hold. Rather, let me find my identity in being called Your child. Let me live in the reality of Your Gospel that proclaims me as Your righteous and loved heir of the inheritance. Since that is who I am, let me be a vessel of that Gospel to all those in my life. Even in some small way, let me experience the community of Your Trinity, that Your power would be at work in me. This I pray in Jesus' name, amen.

Pray...that our church would be known for living out our identity in Christ.

Pray...that the small groups of our church would be welcoming and loving to those who enter in.

Pray...that we would be a church identified by our Christ-like love for one another as we boldly live in uncommon community.