

# FROM CONFUSION TO CLARITY

## CULTIVATING CONNECTION IN A DISCONNECTED WORLD

### BEFORE THE LESSON

Our examination of Scripture today will look at snapshots from introductions to six of Paul's letters, or 'epistles,' to the early church. In looking at these, we will be examining the themes and questions of: how to remain connected in a disconnected world, how to be the church in our current times, as well as how to seek community. It would be useful to read these Scripture references ahead of time so you as a leader can more deeply discuss the themes of this lesson.

### TIPS TO SHARE WITH LEADERS

The scripture verses have been added to this study in the Message Version and they help put Paul's words in common language. Consider reading the verses in other versions if desired.

### STARTING THE LESSON

This study will focus on six different Scripture snapshots, written by Paul to the early church. We will walk through them and discover how Paul encouraged the believers to remain connected as the Church of Christ. Let's apply these ideas to our lives today.

### STARTER QUESTION

- If you're comfortable, do share how you are doing relationally. Are you feeling lonely in these times?

### OPENING PRAYER

Lord, we welcome you in this time together. Thank you for being our comforter. You are closer than our breath. Would you be near to us in this time and develop rich community with one another? Holy Spirit, draw us close to God and one another. Amen.

## **BIBLE PASSAGE REFERENCES (MSG VERSION)**

2 Tim 1:4 - I miss you a lot, especially when I remember that last tearful good-bye, and I look forward to a joy-packed reunion.

Ephesians 1:15-19 - That's why, when I heard of the solid trust you have in the Master Jesus and your outpouring of love to all the followers of Jesus, I couldn't stop thanking God for you—every time I prayed, I'd think of you and give thanks... and ask the God of our Master, Jesus Christ... to make you intelligent and discerning in knowing him personally... so that you can see exactly what it is he is calling you to do, grasp the immensity of this glorious way of life he has for his followers, oh, the utter extravagance of his work in us who trust him—endless energy, boundless strength!

Eph 1:20-23 - All this energy issues from Christ: God raised him from death and set him on a throne in deep heaven, in charge of running the universe, everything from galaxies to governments, no name and no power exempt from his rule. And not just for the time being, but *forever*. He is in charge of it all, has the final word on everything. At the center of all this, Christ rules the church. The church, you see, is not peripheral to the world; the world is peripheral to the church. The church is Christ's body, in which he speaks and acts, by which he fills everything with his presence.

Colossians 1:18-20 - He was supreme in the beginning and—leading the resurrection parade—he is supreme in the end. From beginning to end he's there, towering far above everything, everyone. So spacious is he, so roomy, that everything of God finds its proper place in him without crowding. Not only that, but all the broken and dislocated pieces of the universe—people and things, animals and atoms—get properly fixed and fit together in vibrant harmonies, all because of his death, his blood that poured down from the cross.

Phil 1:12-14 - I want to report to you, friends, that my imprisonment here has had the opposite of its intended effect. Instead of being squelched, the Message has actually prospered. All the soldiers here, and everyone else, too, found out that I'm in jail because of this Messiah. That piqued their curiosity, and now they've learned all about him. Not only that, but most of the followers of Jesus here have become far more sure of themselves in the faith than ever, speaking out fearlessly about God, about the Messiah.

2 Thessalonians 1:4 - We're so proud of you; you're so steady and determined in your faith despite all the hard times that have come down on you. We tell everyone we meet in the churches all about you.

1 Corinthians 1:10 - I'll put it as urgently as I can: You *must* get along with each other. You must learn to be considerate of one another, cultivating a life in common.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

### QUESTION 1

- In 2 Timothy, Paul is explaining his deep affection for his far-off friends. How he misses them. It is comforting to hear that it is normal to miss meeting together in person. What are some ways that you have had to put in a little more effort to connect with others in this time?

*Answers may vary. Perhaps they have gotten creative about meeting together outside, socially distanced; been on Zoom more than possibly desired but are willing to sacrifice to maintain friendships; been investing more in their family relationships; have had a lot of challenges and have not successfully connected in this time...it's all worth the effort because of the work of God through Christ.*

### QUESTION 2

- In the verses in Ephesians and Colossians, Paul is completely fixated on the truth that God is the ruler of the universe, the fixer and redeemer. That Jesus is the head of the Church. Paul's idea is that the Church is a community where broken and dislocated things get put back together through the healing work of Jesus. How can we reorient our lives back on the truth that church, true community, is where we can run in these times? What are some steps we can take to choose to be known by others and by God?

*Jesus is alive and the Holy Spirit is moving in the church to bring healing, redemption, freedom, and so much more. Taking the leap of faith by getting vulnerable with other believers is a way that God can and will restore his people. It's a choice to be known. Perhaps distraction, busyness, or shame are keeping you silent. When we listen to lies about our worth, we often pull away from others. Perhaps try some of these ideas to push out of your comfort zone: seek after healthy people who are following Jesus, try asking them to talk on the phone or connect in some way; alternatively, every so often, say "yes" to an invitation from a healthy person to connect; be the friend you wish others would be for you; with someone you trust, share that last 2% or hidden thought/action that you have never shared with anyone else. Vulnerability is hard, but it's in that place, in the light, that Jesus can begin to do the work of redemption (1 John 1:7). This is how God created us to fight, together.*

### QUESTION 3

- In the passage in Philippians, Paul shares that imprisonment has only increased the Gospel message. Pastor Julia called this good fruit growing in strange soil. (Also see 2 Thess). How does this encourage you to trust Jesus and the Holy Spirit to move during times of great trial? How have you seen the Gospel go forward even louder recently?

*Jesus is faithful to us and can use difficulty to bring good things. Remain faithful and listen to the Holy Spirit who helps us. Perhaps being home has been stressful but maybe you've seen an increase in intimacy with your family or friends, maybe there has been some healing or some of God's truth shared...*

#### QUESTION 4

- In the passage in 1 Corinthians, Paul commands the people of the church to get along. How can we cultivate a life in common with one another?

*Answers will vary...this is so hard to do. But we were made for community. Part of getting along with people who are different than us requires listening. Truly taking in someone else's perspective. Taking our time. Being quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry (James 1:19). It takes living life together, including one another, inviting each other into our day to day. See Colossians 3:12-16—living a life of love, the life of Christ.*

#### PRAYER MINISTRY

##### COMMUNITY PRAYER

Take a few moments to settle into a comfortable position. Let's pray, Holy Spirit come. We need you. Wait. Breathe.

Lord would you bring to mind one or two people that you want us to reach out to in the next week. Whether that's calling them, dropping off a surprise, asking them to connect on Zoom...please show us Lord who you want us to be in community with. Help us to have the confidence to seek out knowing and being known by others, especially other believers. Lord give us the grace in those relationships to know you better too. Thank you, God, that you have made us to be in community with others. Thank you that we can lean into the Church in good and bad times. Help us and give us deep love for one another. Amen.

Perhaps spend some time sharing the names aloud of those you felt called to reach out.

Give space for those who may be feeling lonely in this time. Encourage them that they are seen and loved. Perhaps they are who you are to reach out.