



**Face the Issue:**

Sociologists say that Americans are spending less time together in social activities and civic engagement than ever before. Statistics show that participation in civic associations, local and national politics, churches and social clubs, and time spent with family, friends, and neighbors has dropped by 25–50 percent in the last 30 years.

In our study, we have learned that one of our purposes is to belong together. Jeremy pointed out to us that we are wired that way. It is a part of our nature.

*Where do you find your primary support as a Christian? With family members? With a small group? With co-workers? With Christian friends outside your church?*

*In your experience, what are the greatest obstacles to meaningful Christian fellowship? People are too busy? People don't see each other often enough outside of church? People don't see it as that important?*

*What experiences of Christian fellowship have you had? What were some of your positive and negative experiences?*

**Into the Word:**

**Read 2 Corinthians 5:16–21**

The Message Bible states part of this passage this way:

“All this comes from the God who settled the relationship between us and Him, and then called us to settle our relationships with each other. God put the world square with Himself through the Messiah, giving the world a fresh start by offering forgiveness of sins. God has given us the task of telling everyone what He is doing. We're Christ's representatives. God uses us to persuade men and women to drop their differences and enter into God's work of making things right between them.”

The same action that saves us and brings us into fellowship with God also reconciles us to others and brings us into fellowship with each other in the community of faith.

*With which statement do you find yourself agreeing most:*

- 1) Part of God's saving work is to create the church, a fellowship of believers.*
- 2) The creation of the church, a fellowship of believers, is not part of God's saving work, but it is one of the consequences of God's saving work.*

*3) The church, the fellowship of believers, is just an instrument that God uses to bring people to faith and to strengthen and support them in their daily walk with Christ.*

*4) The creation of the church as a fellowship of believers is for the purpose of mission in the world—bringing others to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ.*

*Why did you choose the statement you did? Do you find yourself agreeing with more than one statement? What is the difference between the four positions? What is at stake in each position?*

### **Read Ephesians 2:11–22**

Humans prefer being with people like themselves, in what are called affinity groups. We're more comfortable around others from the same nation, culture, and social and economic group. We're more relaxed and less on guard when we socialize with those who share our value system and religion.

"Birds of a feather flock together," we say. But this idea is challenged and broken down in true Christian fellowship. In Paul's world, the most hostility, culturally and religiously, was between Gentiles and Jews. This bitterness carried into the church. Paul, however, taught that Christ has made peace between these two groups. Now, through Christ, formerly hostile people are being made one. The dividing wall of hostility has been destroyed by Christ's death. A new "building" is under construction, one people of God, who are the dwelling place for the Spirit of God.

*Do you agree or disagree that part of God's re-creative work in the world is to break down walls of alienation and hostility between groups—between nations, cultures, and language groups, between rich and poor, the educated and the less educated, men and women, young and old, black, white, and brown? Why or why not? Why should the fellowship among believers be more important than natural, human divisions?*

### **Apply The Word**

*Christian fellowship takes time and effort. What are you willing to give up in your busy schedule to enrich Christian fellowship in your life and those Christians with whom you relate? How is God calling you personally to take Christian fellowship more seriously?*