

**Wednesday, April 3, 2019 – Lent Midweek V**  
**“Isolation and Community”**

1 Corinthians 12: 12-27

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Dialogical Structure

*Adapted from CSL “The Gospel in Seven Words”*

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen.

The gospel in seven words. That’s our theme this Lent. That’s our goal during these forty days leading up to Easter. As we take seriously Peter’s command that we prepare ourselves to confess the hope we have in Christ, we’re considering how we might summarize the gospel in seven brief words. As we’ve been saying for several weeks now, seven words can’t possibly say everything that needs to be said about Jesus in seven words. But forcing ourselves to summarize the gospel helps us get to the heart of the matter. It forces us to answer this important question: When it’s all said and done, what is the good news of Jesus Christ?

Over the last two weeks we’ve been thinking about some prominent and recurring images and themes in the Bible. Two weeks ago, we considered captivity and freedom—and we talked about how Jesus frees us from captivity to sin and death. Last week we reflected on death and life—and we discussed how Jesus gives life to those who are dead in sin. With both of these themes we noticed that confessing the gospel involves two fundamental truths. First, the gospel is bad news before it is good news. It is the bad news of a creation that has turned away from its Creator. This bad news is the source of all that is wrong with this world. But the gospel is also, and even more so, good news. It is the good news of a God who loves his creation and reigns over it in mercy and love through the God-man, Jesus the Christ.

Tonight, we’re going to examine another prominent biblical theme. But before we do, let me encourage you to continue the process of trying to articulate the gospel in your own words. There are many images and concepts and truths about God’s love for us in Christ that you could draw from. The themes we’ve considered the last two weeks only scratch the surface. As these weeks of Lent continue, I encourage you to continue your own study of the Scriptures, to reflect on the language of your favorite hymns, to think about faithful brothers and sisters in Christ and how they model the Christian life for you. And let that raw material supply you with words for your own seven-word confession.

The theme I'd like to consider with you this evening is, in my opinion, one of the most obvious and pressing issues in our culture today. I'm talking about isolation and community.

I'm convinced that, despite (and maybe, in part, because of) the global and immediate connectivity we have at our fingertips on our phones, we are in the midst of a sweeping epidemic of social isolation. And it's not just me. *Fortune* magazine published an article just a few years ago (June 22, 2016) called, "Chronic Loneliness is a Modern-Day Epidemic." The article describes the physical and emotional problems associated with loneliness. It analyzes our present situation and examines the causes that contribute to it. It even suggests a pill that could help us deal with loneliness! Studies have shown that the percentage of people who are regularly lonely has more than doubled. In the 1970s and 80s, 11–20 percent reported frequent loneliness. In 2010 the numbers jump to 40–45 percent.

Maybe you can relate. Perhaps you know what it means to feel alone. Sometimes we feel that way because we are literally the only person in the house, or the apartment. Let's be honest. Even if you are an independent person, life can get kind of lonely. Just when you thought you were getting along fine by yourself, you are overcome with feelings of isolation. Other times we feel alone even in a crowded room, or in a big family. We may be sharing space with other people, but there seems to be a distance, or a disinterest, or a dearth of real connection. Then there's loneliness that sneaks up on us through social media. You've got hundreds of friends, thousands of "likes," and you find yourself alone with your phone, trying to convince yourself that this is community enough.

The Scriptures have much to say about isolation and community. And I have the feeling you do, too. So let's get back to our work together. I've got my marker with me again this week, and I'm going to need your input. As we've done for the last several weeks, I'm looking for your help as we do a little brainstorming. I'll keep a running list here on this paper. Together we'll generate another page of raw material from which to craft our versions of the Gospel. By the end of the evening tonight, hopefully we'll have some good raw material for crafting your own version of the gospel in seven words.

Let's begin with a reading from the Psalms. I'm thinking of a few verses from Psalm 68 that came from the pen of David. Here's what he wrote (Psalm 68:4–6a): "Sing to God, sing praises

to his name; lift up a song to him who rides through the deserts; his name is the Lord; exult before him. Father of the fatherless and protector of widows is God in his holy habitation. God settles the solitary in a home.”

All of us have experienced feelings of loneliness. When you think about being lonely, what is the first word that comes to mind?

Listen to Genesis 2:18. Why is it “not good” for us to be alone?

Can you think of people in the Scriptures who found themselves alone?

*Moses, as he led the people of Israel in the wilderness (Numbers 11, especially v. 14)*

*David, as he was being pursued by Saul (Psalm 25:16, 102:7, 142:4)*

*Lepers, who had to live apart from the rest of the community (Luke 17)*

*Paul (2 Timothy 1:15)*

*Jesus, on the cross*

Consider the most joyful moments in your life. During many (if not most) of our most joyful moments, we are with other people. Why do you think that is?

When you think of heaven, what comes to mind?

*Ask question again after reading Revelation 7:9–10.*

Imagine a family reunion during which there is an elaborate and celebratory feast. Imagine there are no quarrels, grudges, past arguments, or lingering frustrations. It’s all the good about a family reunion with none of the bad. Can you see it? Ok. Now, what words would you use to describe what you see?

Sometimes we describe the Lord’s Supper as a foretaste of the feast to come. Describe what is happening to a community that celebrates the Lord’s Supper together.

In 1624 the Christian poet and clergyman John Donne said, “No man is an island.” He was right. That’s why it wasn’t good for man to be alone. God created us to be in community—with him and with one another. That’s why, tonight, we consider the gospel in terms of the gracious community into which God places us. We are baptized into Christ and each other. We commune with the Lord as one body around one table. And together we live through good times and bad, glorying God and supporting one another in Christian love and charity. All because of the gospel. All because of Jesus.

Listen again to Psalm 68:4–6. “Sing to God, sing praises to his name; lift up a song to him who rides through the deserts; his name is the Lord; exult before him. Father of the fatherless and protector of widows is God in his holy habitation. God settles the solitary in a home.”

God, in Christ, refuses to leave us on our own. In Jesus’s name. Amen.