

BELPRES CHURCH

Come Together

Romans 15:1-7

Speaker: Sergio Chavez

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God, we come to you today as humble servants, Lord. We come to you to hear your word, your Holy Spirit to change our lives, Lord. Change the desires in our heart in order to come together as a community. In your beautiful and your glorious statement, together we all said amen. Have a seat.

Now, you can stand the whole time if you want. That's up to you. Let's reach scripture together. Romans 15:1-7 says, "We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Each of us should please our neighbors for their good, to build them up. For even Christ did not please himself. But as it is written, the insults of those who insult you have fallen on me. For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us so that through the endurance taught in the scripture and the encouragement they provide, we might have hope."

"May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you the same attitude of mind toward each other that Christ Jesus had, so that with one mind and one voice, you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Accept one another. Then just as Christ accepted you in order to bring praise to God, not to you, but to God, for I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the Jews on behalf of God's truth, so that the promises made to the patriarchs might confirm or might be confirmed. And moreover, that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy."

Now, for those of you who don't know me, my job here with God's help is to bring our worship communities together, the sanctuary, modern, New Hope, who's our East African Praise and our partner church, Seattle Chinese Covenant, Chinese-speaking Church, which we heard from Pastor Ian, their pastor a few weeks ago, if you haven't seen it or heard it, go online, check it out. English speakers and non-English speakers to come

closer together through the power of the Holy Spirit and cultural competency. That is what I do every day. That's what I do inside this church, and that's what I do outside this church because I'm an immigrant, so I'm always having to figure out multiple cultures all the time.

And that is what we hear here in Romans, how to come together in a faith community when we are from different cultures. And hear at Bell Press, the vision is to spread the love of God out to the world as disciples, and well that requires an authentic community that is led by the Holy Spirit. We are not meant to do this as individuals, but as a community. And outside of the Bible, we already know from social science we are not meant to go it alone. We are social beings. And that's just not for this Bell Press Church, but that's for all Christ followers in the world.

And because I'm an extrovert, I can talk about community all day long from the Bible, in the Bible and outside the Bible. But you don't have to be an extrovert to be in a faith community, and we do not have time for that. So we're going to have to hit it hard. Y'all ready? All right, here we go. So there's a book called Together on the Jesus Road by Evelyn and Richard Hibbert. And it's a book of missionaries who are predominantly from western cultures, US America, Great Britain and Australia, who go and minister to people outside of their cultures.

One of the quotes in this Bible, which is great, I really love it, says, "A Ukrainian believer was asked, 'What is the most important thing I can do to build relationships with Ukrainians?' He responded, 'Be willing to waste time'." Woo, child. That is not Bellevue talk. That isn't even Issaquah talk. That's like Carnation talk. That's like North Bend talk. We ain't got no time for that. Can't be wasting time with people.

Another great quote from there says, "When we asked intercultural disciples what they think is the most important thing in discipling people from other cultures, several said food. Eating together is a crucial aspect of intercultural discipling. In most cultures, eating together is a key way of communicating that you accept and value the other person." Well, this sounds a lot like Jesus. This cat was wasting time all the time and he was eating with people all the time. There is no indication of Scripture that he walked all that fast. He went through a wall one time. That's an old getting born in the New Testament, but otherwise, that cat seemed to be taking his time.

There was even a time of like, "Hey, yo, Jesus, your buddy Lazarus, he's sick, he might die." He's like, "Okay, we'll get there." He waited four days. They were like, "Nazarene, please." They were like, "Yo." After four days he's like, "Hey, let's go see Lazarus." I'm like, "No, Lazarus is dead, yo." He's like, "Well, you said he was sick." He's like, "He was sick four days ago, but now he got a minor case of death." He's like, "Well, we'll go see him anyways and go anyways." He was not in a hurry.

The other thing is He was always eating with people. He would even invite himself. There was Zacchaeus, a cat up in a tree. For those of you who don't know me, I use cat for people. So I say Cat is a person, not cat as a meow. So I say a cat up in a tree, I actually mean a cat up in a tree, a person named Zacchaeus. So this cat was up here, he just wanting get a glimpse of Jesus and Jesus was like, "Hey, yo, Z, I'm coming to your place for dinner." He just invited himself over to somebody's house and Zacchaeus is like, "Yo, I'm short, man, I can't run that fast. I am like the Kevin Hart of the Bible. I can't get there before you. I can't run with these cat William legs. I'm like, come on man, you got to hold up." He wasted time and he ate with people because He knew the importance of relationship.

So we know Jesus was always in community, but then after Jesus died and was resurrected, He left the gospel to be spread to the masses through his followers. And so not only are we commanded to be in community, but these new communities that we're forming we're from different backgrounds, different cultures within the New Testament. And that is where the book of Romans comes into play, because they're from different cultures. That's why we read in 15:17, it says, "Accept one another, Jew, Gentile, female, male, slave, free, young, old. Accept one another. Social outcasts, accept one another. Then just as Christ accepted you in order to bring praise to God." Not to you, not to your community, but to God.

So we got to get a little bit of backstory of the book of Romans, what we call the book of Romans, actually a letter from Paul. And Paul wrote this letter to a church that was in Rome that he didn't help plant. He'd actually hadn't been there. It says in the first seed that he'll get there someday. Theologians have some theories of who planted it, but he didn't plant it. When you read the book of Ephesians or Galatians or Thessalonica, well, Paul helped plant those. So when he writes them, he's writing them personally to them because he's been there, but he hasn't been to Rome.

This is a church comprised of Gentiles who are non-Jews so they didn't have Jewish background, and Jews who have the Jewish background but the thing that brings them together is they both believe in Jesus Christ. They both believe that Jesus was the Messiah. And they were struggling with how they should follow God as they were a diverse church of multiple cultures, and so much so that their quarreling kind of caught the ear of Empress Claudius. He didn't like the fact that they were quarreling. He was worried about maybe some uprising or something. So he didn't really know about this. I mean, he kind of knew about this whole Jesus thing going on, but didn't understand too much we don't think. But he definitely understood Jews because Jews had been established for millennia. So he decided, "Well, let's take care of this by just kicking out all the Jews." He just straight displaced a whole people and threw them out.

It only lasted for like four or five years because eventually Emperor Claudius died. So about four or five years there's these Gentiles who were kind running their church as they

saw fit because there was no Jews to be around. But after Claudius died, now the Jews come back to Rome, come back to this church. And now this church is of multiple cultures, faith, backgrounds, languages, origins of birth and cultural norms, what we call today as New Testament believers.

So considering Paul has never been to the church in Rome, he writes them this letter in kind of generality because he hasn't been there, but he systematically lays out the gospel for them and for what they're facing. It's by many thought to be one of his most important writings. And Paul goes on to explain the righteousness of Jesus, how Jesus is salvation of humanity and ultimately that they are to come together in Christ regardless of their cultural differences.

When you read the book of Romans, it boils down to love in action, which will bring a community together as one. It is the love of God for us that we are to share with others that will bind communities. We read this in Romans 12:9-10, it says love must be what? Sincere, not social media #loves. Not all that stuff. But sincere, not superficial, hate what is evil, cling to what is good, be devoted to one another in what? Love.

Love. Honor one another above yourself. That's not Bellevue talk, that's not US talk. To love one above yourself, but to honor them above yourself because you are devoted to one another in love. And in short, when you read all of Romans, here's what Paul never says, "It would be more efficient if y'all just segregated. Just make a church for the Gentiles and you guys can do what you need to do there and just make a church for the Jews and you guys can do what you need to do there." [foreign language 00:10:09]. Nah, son, that's not what he says. He spends a whole letter to tell them, "You are to come together in honest relationships under the power of the Holy Spirit and the name of Jesus Christ." It might be more efficient to segregate, but God is about unity and reconciliation. One of the things it requires, which I think it applies for us today, is we might need to waste time with each other.

In the podcast How to Talk to People: The Infrastructure of Community, a quote from a guest called Eric Klinenberg, he's a social scientist, so he studies organizations or systems within social constructs. And so there's certain things where efficiency is a good thing, like a fast food restaurant. That's the whole point. That's what it's designed to be fast. So efficiency is key for a fast food restaurant to be effective and successful. Whether it's healthy for you or not, that's a different sermon. Someone else can preach that. But that's designed to be efficient. Church, it's not designed to be efficient.

So I want to take his quote and I want to put it into context, into Romans and to us today and change his quote a little bit to say efficiency is the enemy of true community. Worship community, it's not a drive-thru. It's not a place where you can run by and get

your salvation and hashtag #blessyourselfoutofhere. That's not designed that way. Read through scripture. If you find that's how it is, please let me know because I clearly have been reading it wrong.

Well, guess what peoples, my fellow peoples here at Bell Press? You happen to be sitting in a building that's filled with people from multiple cultures, multiple languages, multiple origins of birth, multiple backgrounds. We have everyone here. We have US Americans, we have African Americans, we have Latinos, Mexicans, Hondurans, Japanese, Koreans, Ghanaians, Indians, and people that I haven't met yet, I'm sure from other Indonesians, people that I don't know. And I will get to you at one point, all of you to know who that is. You are already sitting in a room full of multiple cultures. And not only in this building but out there too. So there's no escape and there shouldn't be an escape. It should be welcomed.

The vision of Bell Press is to be a multicultural, intergenerational, discipling faith community. If we don't learn to be in the type of community that Paul talks about or describes in Romans, we're never going to make it. At best, what we will fall into is within these walls is some form of tribalism, which I think in today's terms we call it cliques. Being the person who has to work between multiple cultures, let me be the one to tell you, we ain't got time for that. This is not the West Side story. We are not the Montagues and the Capulets or the Decepticons and the Autobots or whatever groups you want to choose that are on opposite sides. We ain't got time for that.

So listen listen to your Uncle Yayo closely. If there's anything you're going to remember from today, if there's anything I want you to go on with today, remember this, if we don't learn to be in relationship together, we will never make it. You cannot disciple people if you do not have authentic relationships. That goes for inside this building and outside this building.

We've already decided. At Bell Press, we've already talked about what are the marks of disciples. And when you go through the marks of disciples, you'll see that community is involved. You will see that you will need these marks of disciples to be in a healthy spiritual community. One, marked by Jesus love and grace. We are human beings. We make mistakes. People will say things that will hurt your feelings. We'll do things wrong unintentionally. So we will need love and grace in order to reconcile, to be graceful with one another. We will make mistakes.

Live sacrificially. We heard it in Romans. Honor one another above yourself. That sounds living sacrificially. We are equipped and eager to share the good news of Jesus. Well, in order to share the good news of Jesus, you kind of need people around you because you can't just share it with yourself. So you're going to need some community. We are healers of injustice in the world. As you broaden your community, other cultures, you will

start hearing about the injustice of the world that maybe you didn't know about. And instead of getting it from a social media feed or from your newsfeed, you're going to hear it from a person. You're going to hear a personal story of how it's affecting them. And that may be where God calls you to heal injustice just by listening.

And number five, how interesting it says, let me read it properly, live connected to a multicultural, multigenerational community. Did you hear that online? Let me say it again. Live in a connected to a multicultural, multigenerational community. Look at that. I should stop preaching. We can just go home now. Forget that. And then the last one, know and obey Jesus as Lord through prayer and Scripture. Well, you got that in Romans. You want to know? Read Romans.

Now it's easy for me to talk about community. Why? Because I'm an extrovert, right? And this really should be like my intervention. I should have started this out with, "Hi, my name is Sergio Chavez. I'm an extrovert."

Hi, Sergio.

Yes. Now you don't have to be an extrovert to be in community, in the faith community. I, for one, yes, I'm an extrovert. I'm over 100 on the Myers-Briggs scale. I think they gave my extrovert points to somebody else. They're like, "Give it to Phil. He needs them. Just hand it over to him." My wife on the other hand, no, no, no. She is not an extrovert. She is an introvert. And so it's difficult for my wife and I, but you can find ways. You just do community different. What she does is she serves people. She serves food at potluck or something. That way she has a barrier in front of her so she can keep people away because she can only handle people at certain amounts. And then she uses me as a human shield and catapults me into the crowd so I can make a barrier of social or social interaction around her.

So there's ways you can be an introvert and still be in community. It's just different. English speakers or non-English speakers. For my non-English speakers, I know it's difficult to learn English. I know it's difficult, and you may feel like your English isn't very good so you're embarrassed about it. But don't worry, keep on trying. Anyways, pretty much everybody in here has Google Translate so the faith community can help. And don't feel so bad because most people in this room had like two or three years of Spanish and they can barely order a Chipotle in Spanish. They then go up right up to the window, like, "[foreign language 00:16:39]." They're like, "Sir, I asked you if you wanted chicken or beef." "[foreign language 00:16:45]. Thank you."

"I'm going to give you beef. We're going to move on." So don't feel so bad. They even went to school for it and they still can't speak Spanish.

Relational cultures versus non-relational culture, task-based cultures. Relational cultures. Listen to me, I've come from a collective culture, relational culture. Latinos. It's Indians. It's many African countries. Listen to me. Understand that it is not common for most Westerners to invite you into their homes and to tell you upfront about their personal lives. That takes time. And it's a different kind of trust building. It's not because they don't like you. It's just not common in certain communities and in certain parts of the country. And as for you task-based cultures, we'll do what Dr. Dudley has told you for many years, get beyond news, weather and sports.

Now, you don't have to be an extrovert. You don't have to know English. You don't have to be from a collective culture to be in a faith community, but we do need Jesus because Jesus gives us the endurance and the encouragement to desire the spirit of unity that only comes from Christ. So through prayer and scripture, I'm going to give you a few small steps of what we can do to just start this. Just a couple of small steps.

First, one, sit in a different place for the month of February. Some of y'all have been going to this church for 10, 20, 50, 30 years. We know what your seat is. We can see your cheek indentation. We're like, "That's where Phil sits." Move. Move and say hello to your neighbor. Go to a different worship service than your own. We have plenty here. And say hello to your neighbor. Or something that's even not on Sundays and say hello to your neighbor.

Now, we have separate worship service here because of language barriers and worship styles and preferences, but we don't have a separate community. It is responsibility of the leaders to figure out the worship services, but the community, building a community in Christ, that's your responsibility. That's Christ working through you to bring us together. We can't force you to like each other. That is relational on your end.

After you pick up your kids, note, after you pick up your kids, hit up the playground and talk to another family. Say hello to your neighbor. Attend our Stories of Cultures, which we hold here. The second Sunday of every month, after service, we hold up and you see a 105, 106. We even serve lunch. And listen to our diverse communities. Next week we have one. I know it's Super Bowl Sunday, but for those of you who don't watch football, come over, we're going to hear from our Chinese sisters and brothers. They're going to talk about Chinese New Year, which is linked to Lunar New Year that's celebrated in many Asian countries.

Serve in an area you have not done before. Serve coffee in the upper campus. Make a meal for the youth on Sunday nights. It doesn't have to be on Sunday. There's plenty of things going on here. Help set up chairs for a New Hope event or for the widow's Lunch. Help serve food. Come to the staff meetings. Come service some food. I'd love to see what y'all all got. I like banana bread. But the point is, connect with the community you

don't normally connect with. And it needs to go beyond Sunday. There's other days in the week.

And this goes for online people too. I got to tell you, I love you guys, but I just want you to know, social distancing is over. We need your cheeks here, not for our sake, but for your benefit. You are missing out on community. Now, it doesn't mean you can't have community online. When I was the AV director, I went to the retirement homes and I set up the live-streaming there. And it was cool, man. They had over 20 people meet in a room. They had church together. Now that was community. But if you're sitting in your pajamas, sipping coffee all by yourself, you are missing out on this community. Reserve live-streaming for when you're traveling or when you're sick, or if you're just not able to come here. But if your legs work like Zacchaeus, bring your cheeks up in this joint.

Through prayer and the nudging of the Holy Spirit, God will call you to where you need to develop new relationships inside our faith community and outside our faith community. In your work, at your school, in your neighborhood, God will lead you. Just remember, we want to be Christ-like, but to be Christ-like, I've said this before, you kind of need to know what Christ was like, and that cat was wasting time and meeting with people all the time.

So I want to close today with a testimony from our last Stories of Culture last month where we had some of the sisters and brothers from Seattle, Chinese, Covenant Church share their immigrant journey to the US and we had this young cat named Zack. I think his last name is Zack Zhou. I think that's how you pronounce it. Well, when Zack came to the US as a student from China, he was picked up by someone from the International Student Fellowship. And they welcomed him and took him in. And so he was immediately part of a community. This is what he said. And I quote, he said, "They helped me. This International Student Fellowship helped me to get college life on track, setting up a bank account, phone service, moving into a dorm and they invited me to Friday night Fellowship, fun bible studies, ping-pong and football games too."

He didn't know Christ back in China. He kind of knew of the idea, but he wasn't a Christian. He didn't know anything about Christ. And it is through this community that he came to faith, because there was a community designed to meet people from different cultures who first made sure he belonged. This is the power of God's community.

This is why Paul through 15, through this section, he ends it in 15:13, where he says, "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in God so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit."

Bow your heads with me. Father in heaven, thank you so much for the community that you have brought to our doorsteps, Lord. Whether we've lived here for 8 years or we've

lived here only for two years, Lord, there is a community here, Lord, a faith community that's going to look to Christ, look to you, Lord. May you change the desires of our heart through the power of your Holy Spirit. Give us eyes to see, and ears to hear on people who are hurting in our community, people maybe we've hurt in the past. Lead us to reconciliation. Lead us to a future where we can be a stronger community so we can be the light on the hill, not to just ourselves, but to the world. In your beautiful and your glorious state and together we all said amen.

Discussion Questions:

Read this week's scripture(s) & answer the below questions with your friends, family, or All In small group.

Opening Question: Looking back to last week's sermon and scripture... How did you live differently or practice what we talked about in your life this week? What did you do and how did it go?

Scripture Reflection Questions: Read this week's scripture together and discuss the following:

- What do you feel when you read this scripture (excited, angry, worried, etc....)? Why do you think that is? (Explain in your group and then take that response to Jesus in prayer this week.)
- As you read this scripture, where does it challenge your current cultural context?

Sermon Reflection Questions: Reflecting on this week's sermon, discuss the following:

- Read Romans 12:9-12. Considering Sergio's sermon and our goal of becoming a multi-generational, multi-cultural church, what things might we do differently as we consider Romans 12:9-12?
- If efficiency is the enemy of true community, what are the barriers in your life right now that would need to change so that you might be more willing to "waste" time with others or invite people over to your home for a meal?

Closing Question and Application: Given what we've discussed together today, how might God want you to apply these learnings to your life or in the life of your community this next week? Who might you share this with?

Closing group prayer: Spend a few minutes together in your group sharing prayer requests and then praying together for each other. Thank God for the time together, the conversation shared, the other people in the group, and for encouragement in the week ahead.