

JESUS IN THE TABERNACLE

HOW WE FIT INTO THE PLAN: TOGETHER IN UNITY

A Study Guide from My Daily Bread Global

Think of the people you're closest to in your faith community. Now think of how much of that closeness rests on things you happen to share: taste, background, stage of life. Tonight's lesson asks what actually holds us together when none of that is enough.

WHERE WE LEFT OFF

We've spent several weeks inside the ark: the wood and gold, the three objects it held, and the mercy seat that covers them. Tonight we step back and look at the walls around it. The boards of the tabernacle are easy to skim past, but they carry an answer to a question every believer eventually faces: where do I fit?

THE BIG IDEA

The tabernacle wasn't one big structure. It was dozens of individual boards, each wood overlaid with gold, that only became a dwelling place for God when they were joined. Paul says the same thing is true of us. God doesn't just live in individual believers. He makes His home in believers who are fitted together.

BUILT IN HIM, NOT JUST ON HIM

Ephesians 2 lays out the building in order. First the foundation: the apostles and prophets, with Christ as the cornerstone. That's what we're built on. Then Paul changes his preposition, and it's easy to miss. The whole building is fitted together in Him, not on Him. Being on a foundation is about stability. Being in Christ is about connection, and that's where Paul turns to how we relate to each other.

Ephesians 2:21–22 *In whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.*

Notice the grammar of that last phrase. “You” is plural. The dwelling place is the group, not just each person within it. Many of us have spent our whole faith journey treating God's presence as a private possession. Paul describes it as something that takes shape between people.

STANDING TOGETHER ISN'T THE SAME AS BEING JOINED

Picture the boards for the tabernacle walls, all gold-covered, all upright, all pointing the same direction. Now picture them with nothing connecting them. Same foundation, same hope, same faith, and still not a house. A row of boards leaning near each other can lose any one of them to a strong wind. Boards that are joined can't be pried apart one at a time.

That's a pointed description of a lot of church life. We can share the same convictions, show up to the same gatherings, and even have good moments together, and still lack the thing that lets God's presence settle in. Agreement isn't the same as attachment.

Psalms 133:1, 3 *How good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell together in unity! ... For there the Lord commanded the blessing: life forevermore.*

It's worth noticing where the blessing is located in that psalm: “there,” in the place of unity. The oil, the dew, and the life are attached to a gathering, not to an individual.

THE SILVER THAT HOLDS THE WALLS UP

Exodus 26 tells us what joined the boards: silver sockets. Each board sat in silver bases and was fastened with silver bars running through the frame. In the tabernacle, silver consistently points to redemption, the price paid to buy something back. When the camp moved, the bars came out, the boards were taken down and carried. When it was time to set up again, the same silver went back through the same boards.

That image answers the question of what unites people who have nothing else in common. It isn't personality, politics, or even shared preferences about worship. It's that the same price bought every board. Peter draws the line directly: we weren't redeemed with silver or gold, but with the blood of Christ.

1 Peter 1:18–19 *You were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold... but with the precious blood of Christ.*

Which means the walls of the tabernacle contain a quiet leveling. No board was purchased at a higher rate than the others. Nobody gets to treat their story as the more respectable one, and nobody has to treat theirs as the more shameful one. The same price covered the lot.

ONE BLUEPRINT, MANY HANDS

One more observation worth chewing on: the tabernacle had one design, given to one man, executed by many. There was no committee competing over what the walls should look like. Here's a blunt but fair observation: a lot of church division comes from too many competing visions. That doesn't mean everyone's gifts don't matter. It means gifts are for building the thing God designed, not for building our own.

And Paul's picture of standing firm in Ephesians 6 fits here too: the ancient shield wall worked because soldiers locked shields against each other. The strength was in the overlap, not in any one shield.

SIT WITH THIS

1. Where are you standing next to people in your faith community without actually being joined to them? What is the specific thing keeping you at arm's length?
2. If the same silver redeemed everyone in your church, what do you do with the habit of ranking people's pasts, theirs or yours, as more or less acceptable?
3. Think of a time a group you were part of felt like God's presence was actually in the room. What was true about the people in that room that isn't always true?
4. What would it cost you personally to lay your own vision or preference down so a larger shared one could stand?

BEFORE NEXT TIME

Pick one person in your faith community you've kept at a polite distance. This week, do one concrete thing to attach yourself to them: a call, a meal, a real question. Don't wait for a reason beyond the one you already share, which is that you were both bought.