

## Gospel-shaped Community

---

David Carter

Unshakeable: Romans / Romans 1:7-16

---

Have you ever been part of a big crowd, like at a sports game or a concert and thought, *this is incredible!*

I've been at some Raptor or Blue Jays game when the place is packed, and the score is close and it's down the wire and the Rogers Centre or Scotia Centre is rocking.

It can be an incredible experience.

You're surrounded by thousands of people. You're cheering for the same team. You're singing the same songs. For a couple of hours, it feels like you belong to something bigger than yourself.

There's energy. There's excitement. There's a sense of unity.

But then the event ends.

Everyone files out. You walk back to your car. Or get on the GO Train, head home. And chances are, you'll never see most of those people again.

There was a crowd—but not a community.

And here's the honest question I want us to wrestle with this morning:

What makes a church gathering different than a sporting event or a concert?

That's an important question to ask. Because if we're not careful, church can feel very similar. We sit together. We sing together. We listen to the same message. And then we leave—and our lives barely intersect until next Sunday.

So what makes Christian community different?

Paul is writing to a church he's never met, and yet he describes a kind of community that is deeply connected.

And the difference isn't the people or the culture; it isn't the programs.

It's the gospel.

The gospel creates community; the gospel creates a people.

The gospel isn't just what saves you, the gospel is what unites us as God's people.

I want to ask this morning, what does a gospel-shaped community look like?

If we are building our lives on the gospel, how does the gospel influence how we do life together?

Paul answers that question for us, he says the gospel creates community.

We started our journey through Paul's letter to the Roman church last week and we said, it's all about building on the foundation of the gospel.

That's where Paul started last week, as sort of an introduction.

Last week was all about laying a foundation that we'll build upon.

We talked about the gospel—what it is, who it's about, and why everything in the Christian life is built on it.

But that raises an important question.

If the gospel is the foundation, **what should life on that foundation actually look like?**

Because we all know this:

You can believe the right things and still feel disconnected.

You can attend church and still feel alone.

One thing our society is starting to realize is that there is an epidemic of loneliness in our society. People are looking for meaning, for purpose, for what life is all about.

And so many people are feeling alone in that search. People today are longing for **community**. Real community.

Not just people in the same room, not just friendly faces, but something meaningful, something deep, something that actually shapes how we live.

The gospel of Jesus Christ is meant to fill that longing, the church is meant to be that community.

And the truth is, churches can gather people without actually forming a community.

You can fill a room and still not be a people.

So what makes the difference?

What does a gospel-shaped community look like?

What sets a church gathering apart from a baseball game? What's the difference?

Well here's the first thing we see... here's what makes it a community.

A gospel-shaped community is united by grace.

The gospel unites us.

## **UNITED BY GRACE**

Here's what that looks like. Look at how Paul describes this community in verse 7.

[Romans 1:7 \(ESV\)](#)

***“To all those in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”***

There are some words there—some phrases—that should really catch our attention.

Loved by God. Called to be saints.

This is what grace looks like. This is what unites us.

Those who are in Christ are uniquely loved by God.

Now you might say, well, doesn't God love everyone?  
And yes—He does. God so loved the world that He gave His Son.

But those who have embraced His Son—those who belong to Jesus—are loved by God in a unique way.

We actually understand this already. Think about it.

The New Testament describes the church as God's family. And we know how this works in real life.

You can love people. You may love your friends. You may love the people sitting in this room. I love you as my church family.

But you understand what I mean when I say—I don't love you the same way I love my children. My family is uniquely loved by me.

The Bible also describes the church as the bride of Christ.

Again, you get this. I love you as my church family. But I don't love you the same way I love my bride, my wife. That kind of love is unique. It's covenantal. It's personal.

God has a unique love for His church...

Now back up just to the end of verse 6, and you'll see why this matters. Paul says,

**“...you who are called to belong to Jesus Christ.”**

That's the key.

God uniquely loves His Son.

And He uniquely loves those who belong to His Son.

And if you belong to Jesus, and I belong to Jesus—

If you are part of God's family, and I am part of God's family—

What does that make us? That makes us family.

And if people are looking for a place to belong—if they're looking for real community—they should be able to find it is right here, in God's family.

You belong to Jesus.

I belong to Jesus.

You are loved by God.

I am loved by God.

That's what unites us.

But Paul isn't done describing this community.

Look at what else he says.

He says we are called to be saints...

Now that word saints can be a bit confusing for us today.

Maybe you grew up thinking that saints were only those super-spiritual Christians—people who lived extraordinary lives, did miracles, or were officially given the title of saint by the Catholic Church.

That may be how the Catholic Church uses the word saint, but it's not how the New Testament uses it.

In the New Testament, the word saint is regularly used to describe ordinary believers in Jesus—people who are part of a local church.

If you believe in Jesus, you are a saint.

But that word is used very intentionally, because it tells us something about what it means to follow Jesus.

Notice Paul says we are ***called to be saints.***

If you are a follower of Jesus, you have a calling on your life—to be a saint.

Now don't panic. Don't get overwhelmed.

Here's what the word saint actually means.

It simply means set apart for a purpose.

It's about functioning in the purpose you were created to function.

Think about it this way. If I use a fork to eat my food, that fork is being used exactly the way it was created to be used.

But you could also use a fork to try to screw in a nut or a bolt. You could do it—but it wouldn't work very well. It wasn't designed for that purpose.

When the New Testament calls believers' saints, it's saying that we've been set apart for the purpose we were created for—to live in relationship with God, to walk in holiness, to live for His glory.

We've been set apart, sanctified, made holy the same way the Old testament Temple was set apart. It was set apart as a place for worship and communion with God; a place where the presence of God lived.

And we come to the New Testament we find out that believers... you and I... are set apart for worship and the presence of God, the Holy Spirit who lives in us.

No, here's the honest reality: you can be a saint and not live for that purpose.

But it's detrimental.

Just like using a fork for something it wasn't designed for, life doesn't work the way it's meant to when we live outside the purpose God created us for.

So this is what unites us by grace.

Not only are you and I uniquely loved by God,

Not only do we belong to Jesus,

But we have also been called, set apart, for the purposes God created us for.

We've been separated from the world—not to isolate us, but to live our lives for the glory of God.

You and I, as followers of Jesus, are united by the gospel.

We are united by grace.

And here's why that matters so much for us as a church family.

Because over and over again in the New Testament, the command to churches is this:

Maintain the unity of the Spirit. Guard and protect that unity the gospel creates.

Listen to what Paul says in [Ephesians 4:1–3](#).

### [Ephesians 4:1–3 \(ESV\)](#)

***“I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”***

Notice what Paul says—and just as importantly, what he doesn't say.

He doesn't say create unity. He says maintain it.

Because the unity already exists.

The Spirit has already created it through the gospel.

Our responsibility is to guard it, to protect and maintain the unity.

And that's important, because we have an enemy who would love nothing more than to damage the unity of the church.

The enemy doesn't usually destroy a church through persecution.

More often, he works quietly—sowing seeds of discord.

Seeds of division. Seeds of jealousy. Seeds of bitterness. Seeds of resentment.

Unresolved grudges.

And Paul tells us exactly how those seeds are kept from taking root.

With humility. With gentleness. With patience. Bearing with one another in love.

Unity is not maintained by winning arguments or getting our way.

It's maintained when grace shapes how we treat one another.

When what unites us, sustains us, is grace.

How unity might be maintained if we just simply showed each other a bit of grace...

Grace is what unites us, grace is shown in that each of us are uniquely loved and called by God. Each of us, by grace, have been made a part of the family of God and are called for a purpose.

United by grace, but what does this community do, what is it all about?

I think that's what we start to unpack in the next few verses.

Here's what that community is meant to look like.

A gospel-shaped community is grounded in prayer.

## **GROUNDED IN PRAYER**

I get that because well, Paul is praying for this church. And he is praying for them, before he even gets there.

Do you see that in verses 8-10?

### **Romans 1:8–10 ESV**

*First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is proclaimed in all the world. For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I mention you always in my prayers, asking that somehow by God's will I may now at last succeed in coming to you.*

It struck me that Paul says that he prays for this church without ceasing, in other words, he is constantly praying for this church. This is something Paul doesn't just say here in Romans, but he often mentions this in his letter to the churches.

Paul prayed constantly for the church, for his brothers and sisters in Christ. He prayed for the great things that God was doing among them, he prayed for their strength as they were dealing with challenges.

I was challenged this week as I thought about that – is that how I pray for my brothers and sister in Christ?

You know, one of the most encouraging things I hear from so many of you? When someone says pastor, we pray for you and your family everyday. I am deeply grateful for that, it's so encouraging and Lord knows I need it.

But my hope is that I'm not the only one you're praying for like that. As needs arise in our church family, my hope is that you are lifting up in prayer the many needs of our brothers and sister as well.

If we are going to be a gospel-shaped community, we need to be a community, a church grounded in prayer.

Often times when we hear that our church family is going through a trial, or a tribulation. And we want to be able to do something, we want help in some practical way, but sometimes there isn't much we can do...so we'll say, well the least I can do is pray for you.

But friends that's the greatest thing you can do for them. If we believe in the power of prayer, like I know we do, then prayer isn't the least we can do, it's the greatest thing we can do.

I think of [James 5](#) when James says the prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working... there is great power in the prayers of the saints.

But notice, it isn't just the hard times that Paul is praying for these saints, but I thank God because your faith is proclaimed in all the world... he's praying and thanking God for the great things, the great work that God is doing among this church.

It's okay to pray for our brothers and sisters even when nothing is wrong, when good things happen, let's praise God for that, praise God for answered prayer.

I was just talking to a brother this week, we were praying for a medical procedure they might have to undergo and our prayer was that they wouldn't have to, and the report came back and things had progressed positively and he didn't have to have the procedure. Immediately the prayer is praise God, thank you for answered prayer, thank you for blessing my brother.

One of my pastor friends, told me a while back they baptized 30 people in one service. Man, we are praising God because of the faith that is being proclaimed at that church.

Gospel-shaped churches, communities are grounded and fueled by prayer.

Some people say, pastor, we need to focus more on prayer, we need to be a praying church and amen, hallelujah, I hear you and I'll share some ways that we're making prayer a focus on 2026.

But I have to say, just because you don't always see prayer happening, doesn't mean it's not happening.

You know we meet every Tuesday morning as a staff and we pray together; we break off into groups and pray. And we're praying for you in many of those prayers, the issues, the concerns we know about. We're praying for our church, praying for our community.

We meet as elders once a month, we spend significant time praying together as elders.

In fact the elders meet with a group of people every Wednesday on Zoom for prayer and you're welcome and encouraged to join them.

The elders pray in the prayer room every Sunday with a group of people in between the services, again you're welcomed encouraged to join as you're leaving or entering.

Did you know we have a group of men who meet every Tuesday morning and pray?

Of course we have our prayer team here up at the front every week, they're here to pray with you, to pray over life struggles and to give God praise for what's going on.

What I'm hoping, the expectation is, that as you're meeting in your growth groups, that your time is split in 1/3's. 1/3 spent in fellowship, 1/3 spent in the Word, 1/3 spent in prayer together. Part of the purpose for you meeting in your growth groups is that you are spending significant time praying together. Not just as an add-on before and after your meeting, but spend some time praying, seriously, fervently together.

As we move forward in 2026, there is an effort to make prayer more a part of the culture of our church.

Pastor Shirley and one of our elders, Atul Solanki, have been working together to launch a focused prayer ministry in our church, and their hope is to cultivate a culture of prayer throughout every ministry in our church and to have times where we come together as a congregation to pray.

You'll hear more details in the coming weeks, but one of the things we would like to do is have a prayer gathering to kick off the Lent season with a night of prayer, and for 40 days leading up to Easter Sunday our church will be praying and fasting together, we want you to be a part of it.

We believe this strongly, that if we are a gospel-shaped community, we will be a church grounded in prayer.

Listen, if you want to get involved in the prayer ministry and be a part of that team, please reach out to Pastor Shirley, reach out to brother Atul, they would love for you to be a part of it.

One last thing I want us to notice about Paul's prayer for this church, is that he wasn't praying instead of being involved, but his prayer was about how he can be involved.

You notice that he wasn't even there yet, but his prayer was that he would succeed in coming so that, look at verse 11.

**Romans 1:11-12 ESV**

***For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you—that is, that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine.***

Paul is praying about coming not just so that he would receive a blessing from this church, but he is coming to be a blessing to them, notice he says, that we may be mutually encouraged by each others faith, both yours and mine.

It signals to us again, what a gospel-shaped community looks like.

A gospel-shaped community encourages one another, we need each other.

## ENCOURAGES ONE ANOTHER

If we are going to be a gospel-shaped community, the focus needs to be on mutual encouragement.

That's important because despite what many people think, church is not just a place where I come to have my spiritual needs met.

It's not just about what I get.

Church is about **what I bring**.

Paul makes this clear in verses 11 and 12. He says he wants to come and share his spiritual gifts—but also that they would be **mutually encouraged**.

That means:

- I have something to offer you
- and you have something to offer me

I think that's significant to notice because we might understand that Paul wants to share his Spiritual gifting right? He's the pastor in a sense, so yes, come and share, but Paul is saying I don't just want to come and share my spiritual giftings, there is an opportunity for me to be blessed by you and your giftings as well.

I wonder if that's how we understand what church is about? Like so many think that this is what church is about, this right here going on. We think that being a part of a church is sitting in a pew once a week.

But that's no different than what we said about the sports game, you go there, watch something together, sing a few songs, and then leave and then come back next week and do the same thing.

Church is not a spectator sport, that's a church-attender, not a participator.

Attending a church service doesn't make you part of the church.

See, you become a part of the church as you participate in the life of the church. What makes this community more than a religious gathering is that everyone has a role to play, everyone has something to offer.

We truly believe that because that's what the bible teaches, in fact you regularly hear me talk about this from the front. You don't just come here to sit, sing and leave.

The New Testament describes the church as the body of Christ, and each member of that body is much like the members of your physical body, they all have a role to play, they all are vital to the health of the body, you need your eyes, your hands, your feet, your ears, and each cannot function properly without the other.

And the body of Christ is the same way, we need each other, there is no member who does not have a role to play.

The calling of the Christian life is that God has uniquely gifted you and placed you here in this church family for this season. And His calling on your life and my life is that we would use the gifts, the talents, the resources that He has given us to be a mutual encouragement to each other, to do the work of ministry together.

You often hear me talk about our discipleship path, the 4g's that we have on the wall.

Gather, Grow, Give, Go...

Steps that we challenge you to take in your discipleship journey with Christ and us.

And this is the key part of the give step. We ask you to take a step to give, to give of yourself to the work of the Christ here at BBC.

If this is your home church, part of that means being actively engaged in the life of the church.

We often talk about the **three T's**:

- Time — serving in some way
- Talent — using the spiritual gifts God has given you
- Treasure — supporting the work of ministry financially

Paul is saying, I want to come and encourage you with what God has given me—but I also expect that encouragement to be mutual.

That's how the gospel unites us, that's how the gospel shapes us.

But what for what purpose?

Well, notice why Paul is hoping to come – that they may be mutually encouraged...

### **Romans 1:13 ESV**

*I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that I have often intended to come to you (but thus far have been prevented), in order that I may reap some harvest among you as well as among the rest of the Gentiles.*

In order that I may reap some harvest among you...

What does Paul mean by harvest? Well harvest is often used in the bible to describe, fruit, or bearing some kind of bounty from labour. Usually it is about a harvest of the gospel of saved souls, of the kingdom being built and expanded.

That's the purpose, that's the point. It's why Paul wants to come and serve, why he wants them to use their gifts, why he wants them to partner together, not just because it's a great time to be had, but because it's about building and furthering the kingdom, it's about reaching people with the gospel!

That's what sets us apart, that's what unites us, that's why we serve and give so much of ourselves – that the glory of Christ would spread and people would come to be saved.

That brings us to our final point of what a gospel-shaped community looks like and hopefully this is no surprise.

Gospel-shaped communities proclaim the gospel!

### **PROCLAIM THE GOSPEL**

Gospel-shaped community is a gospel proclaiming community.

We are all about the gospel!

That's what we're about, the gospel doesn't just unite us, but it gives us our mission, it gives us our purpose as a church.

The church is not a social club, it's not a place just to hang out, we do not exist for Christian entertainment.

Neither do we exist to end all human suffering or handle all injustice in the world, we are not a humanitarian organization or social justice machine.

We are a gospel proclaiming, Kingdom building community.

Notice how passionate Paul is about the gospel.

#### **Romans 1:14-16 ESV**

***I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish. So I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome. For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.***

Some words that should jump out at us as we read his words, and I'm wondering if they describe our passion for the gospel?

Notice Paul says he is under obligation, that he is eager, that he is not ashamed of the gospel, and he believes in the power of the gospel.

I'm wondering if that describes us this morning? Do we have this sense of obligation, this compulsion that at every opportunity the Lord provides, we have to share the gospel.

Not that we can't have a conversation without talking about the gospel, no, but am I alert, is there an urgency that when the opportunity arises, I am obligated to share?

Am I eager, to share the gospel when the opportunity comes?

And if I'm not eager, is it because I am ashamed of the gospel? Do I believe that the gospel is the very power of God, the power of God to save everyone who believes in it?

Everyone... the Jew, the Greek the barbarian, everyone from every walk of life.

The power of the gospel is not in the person who shares it, but the power of the gospel is in the message.

God's power is in the good news, that God loved you, loved this world so much, that He has provided a way for us to know Him, to have a relationship with Him.

Sin has separated us from God, severed our relationship, but Jesus Christ is God's answer to deal with the penalty of sin, the bondage of sin, the guilt the shame and the destruction of sin.

Jesus comes to die for our forgiveness, to free us as we walk in new life, to restore and make new everything that sin has destroyed.

The good news, the gospel has the power to save everyone, everyone who believes and trusts in Jesus Christ.

Do you feel obligated, eager, do you believe in the power of the gospel to save?

We are a church who is serious about gospel proclamation. We preach the gospel, we teach the gospel, we sing the gospel, we pray the gospel.

We invest time, energy, resources, we partner with gospel minded organizations locally and globally who are all about the spread of the gospel.

Gospel-shaped communities proclaim the gospel.

We hear the mandate, the mission from Jesus.

To go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation.

Just as we close, I couldn't help but notice as I look over what Paul is outlining here as a gospel-shaped community, how what we see here aligns so much with our discipleship path, our mission as a church.

To gather, grow, give, go.

We gather as those who are loved and called by God, we gather because we have been set a part for a purpose.

We grow as we make prayer and God's Word a priority of our gatherings and community.

We give of our time, talent, treasure in the hopes that we are mutually encouraged by the saints.

We go because we believe in the power of the gospel, we go because we obligated, eager, and not ashamed of the gospel.

This is what makes a church, a church. This is what separates a gospel community apart from just a gathering of people into a space.

The question I would leave you with is this.

Are you a part of a gospel-shaped community?

No I'm not asking if you attend a church, I'm asking are you apart of the community?

Have you entered into that community by faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ?

Are you actively participating in that community, regularly praying for those saints? Are you serving, giving of yourself to the work and efforts of that church to spread the gospel? Are you sent out back into the broader community to reach others to be a part of the gospel community?

Following Jesus is not just about you, it's about being a part of His community.

Are you a part of a gospel-shaped community? my prayer is that if your answer is no, then you would make it a priority in 2026.