

Built Together

Sunday August 8, 2026

Ephesians 2:19-22 (NLT) So now you Gentiles are no longer strangers and foreigners. You are citizens along with all of God's holy people. You are members of God's family. ²⁰ Together, we are his house, built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets. And the cornerstone is Christ Jesus himself. ²¹ We are carefully joined together in him, becoming a holy temple for the Lord. ²² Through him you Gentiles are also being made part of this dwelling where God lives by his Spirit.

Introduction: We've been on a series from Ephesians and driving home the reality of being made new in Christ and learning to walk in this new life that God has given us.

One of the things I want to focus today, which is essential, is that this new walk is not a solo walk. It is a walk together with others.

As you can see from our passage, this letter wasn't written to an individual but to a community of believers.

The Christian life was never meant to be walked alone. Our spiritual growth is connected not only to Jesus, but also to one another.

You cannot be built together if you insist on walking alone.

Unlike our highly individualistic Western culture, community was central to the identity and life of the early church.

The church in Ephesus is one of the best examples of believers living in intentional Christian community.

So, what did this kind of community look like? It wasn't just something they believed, it shaped the way they lived. They regularly gathered in homes.

1. They met in homes

When Paul gathered with the elders in Ephesus on his way to Jerusalem, he told them...

“I never shrank back from telling you what you needed to hear, either publicly or in your homes.”
Acts 20:20

The early church didn't meet in large church buildings as we do today. Like most first century churches they met in homes throughout the city.

- Jerusalem – They met in the Temple courts for public teaching and from house to house for fellowship and meals (Acts 2:46).
- Rome – The church met in the house of Prisca and Aquila (Romans 16:3–5).
- Colossae – The church met in Nympha's house (Colossians 4:15).
- Philippi – Lydia's home became a gathering place (Acts 16:40).
- Laodicea – Also in homes (Colossians 4:15).

The New Testament never mentions Christians constructing a church building.

Think about it, for the first three centuries of Christianity, the church grew exponentially without owning church buildings.

Their strength was not found in the size of their gathering or the building they met in, but in Spirit-filled believers who gathered in homes, devoted themselves to Scripture, prayer, fellowship, and the breaking of bread. (Acts 2:42-47)

Eventually buildings became valuable tools for ministry, but they were never intended to be the foundation of the church. It's about the mission not the masonry.

The church has always been God's people, not God's property.

And that is really the point. The early church understood that the building was never the church; the people were the church. Wherever believers gathered around Jesus, His Word, prayer, fellowship, and mission, the church was alive.

That is why small groups matter. We're not trying to recreate first-century church buildings; we're trying to recapture first century relationships.

The goal isn't simply to get people into a house. The goal is to get people into one another's lives so that we can help each other become disciples of Christ and reach our world.

It is sad to drive through our cities and see so many empty church buildings that once housed vibrant congregations.

While every situation is different, they serve as a reminder that when our focus shifts from making disciples to maintaining buildings and institutions, we can lose sight of the mission Christ gave His church.

God is not opposed to building but we must never forget the building and even our homes are simply tools and not the mission.

The mission is not just to hold a service on Sundays, but to gather in ways that encourage one another toward to love and good works. (Hebrews 10:24-25)

Likewise, the purpose of small groups is not merely to build friendships, but to make disciples.

While friendships are a wonderful byproduct, the primary goal is spiritual growth; helping one another follow Christ, obey His Word, and become more like Him.

As we see the early believers didn't isolate themselves from one other. They met together, shared life together and grew in Christlikeness together.

But meeting in homes by itself doesn't create biblical community. You can sit in someone's living room every week, eat their chips and dip and still never really know them. The early believers did more than meet; they shared life together.

2. They shared life together

Ephesians 2:20-22 (NLT) Together, we are his house, built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets. And the cornerstone is Christ Jesus himself. ²¹ We are carefully joined together in him, becoming a holy temple for the Lord.²² Through him you Gentiles are also being made part of this dwelling where God lives by his Spirit.

Observe that Paul never says God is building you individually. Instead, the whole body is being joined together.

Notice his word again to the elders of Ephesus.

Acts 20:18-20 (ESV) "You yourselves know how I lived among you the whole time from the first day that I set foot in Asia, ¹⁹ serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials that happened to me through the plots of the Jews; ²⁰ how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you in public and from house to house,

Paul doesn't just emphasize his sermons. He reminded them that he had lived among them.

- serving with humility
- tears and trials
- encouraging everyone
- warning everyone
- investing day and night

This paints a picture of deep relational ministry, not simply big weekly services.

Paul's ministry wasn't just "come and hear me preach." It was "come see how I live."

Philippians 4:9 (ESV) What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.

And when people begin sharing life at this level, something else naturally develops; a **"one another" culture**.

3. They lived a "One another" Culture

Paul repeatedly instructs the Ephesian believers to live relationally.

You really cannot obey many of the New Testament commands from a distance. Listen to the language Paul uses with the Ephesians...

- Speak truth to one another (4:25)
- Be kind to one another (4:32)
- Forgive one another (4:32)
- Submit to one another (5:21)
- Encourage one another through worship (5:19)

These commands require close relationships. You cannot practice the "one another's" of Scripture by simply attending the same service. We must know one another.

The church in Ephesus wasn't built around an event it was built around relationships. They may have gathered publicly to hear Paul's teaching in the hall of Tyrannus, but they also met in homes, shared life together, served one another and grew in spiritual maturity.

In many ways, what we call small groups today reflects how the early church experienced biblical community.

And here is where biblical community becomes even more powerful: we don't just belong to one another; we need one another. God has designed His church so that every believer has something has a part to play.

4. Every believer had a part to play

Paul teaches that every believer contributes to the growth of the church.

Ephesians 4:16 (ESV) From Him the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

In other words, there are no spectators in the body of Christ. Every joint supplies something. Every part matters. Every believer has a role.

Acts 19 tells us Paul as an Apostle taught daily in the Lecture Hall of Tyrannus in Ephesus for about two years.

This wasn't merely people going to the hall to hear a motivational sermon on "how to live your best life now" or "how to have faith to believe for more money or a better state of life". It was to be trained to realize the mission of taking the gospel of the kingdom to the world.

Luke says: "All the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord." (Acts 19:10)

Ephesus became a missionary hub because believers were equipped and sent, not simply gathered to listen.

But there is one final lesson from Ephesus that we cannot afford to miss. You can have good teaching. You can have strong doctrine. You can have ministry, activity, structure, and even a history of tremendous spiritual impact and still lose the very thing that holds it all together.

About 30-35 years later Jesus spoke to this same church and said:

"You have abandoned the love you had at first." (Revelation 2:4)

They were still doing many of the right things, but something had happened to their love. And without love, community eventually becomes organization. Ministry becomes activity. Small groups become meetings.

What keeps us built together is not simply that we meet together, serve together, or study together. It is that Jesus remains at the center and His love continues to flow through us toward one another.

Church, we were never designed to follow Jesus in isolation. You cannot be built together if you insist on walking alone.

That is what it means to be **Built Together**.