

Sharing the High Life: Radical Community in Jesus

Good morning brothers and sisters. My name is Ryan – I am a member here at Grace Bible Church Corinda. It is a real privilege for me to be able to share God's Word with you this morning. I hope and pray that it is of encouragement to you as it has been to me during my preparation. There is an outline of the sermon in the bulletin. Also if you don't have a bible with you today, we have some out on the table in the foyer, please feel free to grab one so that you can follow along with us this morning. Why don't I pray for us before we get stuck into it? Please bow your heads with me.

Introduction

Humans are meant to be in community but communities are hard to build. Ask any property developer building a new estate and they'll tell you that they're planning a myriad of shared services, community spaces and other initiatives to promote community. I was watching a

documentary last week on Barcelona's superblocks

[CLICK] – superblocks are an urban design concept where roads and streets in a city centre block are closed off to traffic. The goal is reduce vehicles and pollution in urban areas **but another important benefit** is that you reclaim all that area to build more pathways and facilities for **people to come together, enjoy, and build community.**

[CLICK] Here is another example perhaps a little more extreme from a Melbourne apartment developer where no apartment has a dedicated laundry. Instead there is a shared laundry at the rooftop. Residents say and I quote “when you are doing your washing on the rooftop you quickly meet all your neighbours. Meeting people over washing laundry is a good way to break down barriers pretty fast. After that happens a few times, there are no awkward silences!”

But communities can't be manufactured in this way can they? Authentic community requires a shared identity, set of values and ideas.

[CLICK] Even when you do have commonality with each other, community, or more importantly unity, can be hard to maintain. Take these two communities for example - our two major Australian political parties. Even within their communities where they're supposed to have a common goal, the lies and deception to create division amongst themselves has been incredible to observe. At one point Australians did well to remember who the Prime Minister of the day was. **[UNCLICK]**

So how is Christian community different? Is it better? Does it have more to offer? The answer is not that straightforward. My initial response may even surprise some of you, if I said my answer is **NO** to those questions.

Why? Well, because Christians **are not** perfect.

Regardless of how righteous or pious the outside world

views Christians or perhaps as some Christians may like to view themselves – **we are still flawed**. The church is still filled with people who wrong one another and above all disobey God. In a fallen world Christians **can be just as** disappointing as the average person.

However for the Christian, it does not end there. Christian community **is different, it is** better and **it does** have more to offer – not because of us but **because of who we follow**. As followers of Jesus, **He gives us the example and motivation to live in community**. So my message today following on from Ben's sermon last week is titled **Sharing the High Life: Radical Community in Jesus.**

(CLICK)

I have four points to make. **(Read them out!)**

1. Radical Identity (v11-12a)
2. Radical Focus on others (v12b-14)
3. Radical Christ focus – directed by His peace, instructed by His Word, motivated by His name (v15-17)
4. Radical thankfulness (v15-17)

Let's start with the first point...

Radical Identity (v11-12a)

Read with me.

¹¹ Here there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.

¹² Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved,"

Paul continues his thought from the previous verses where he reminds the Colossians of their new reality in Christ. He says to them, that their old selves have died and they have been raised with Christ to be a new creation, a new man. **[CLICK]**

v1 – You have been raised with Christ

V3 - You died with Christ

Yet even though they have been made new, it's still true that while they are living in this world, they are prone to

disobeying God and wronging others. The Bible calls this sin. And Paul is using the analogy of clothing in v9 and 10 to instruct the Colossian believers to put off sins that belonged to their old nature. This does not mean that their status as a new creation is fluid but the reality that in their **EARTHLY BODIES**, as seen in v5 and as a result of a Genesis 3 world that is fallen, they were still going to sin against God and against one another. But **NOW**, being a new creation, they were able to turn away from those character traits that defined their old lives and choose God's higher call to live.

So the clothing analogy then in those two verses and then again in v12 is for us to have a mental picture of the intentionality of putting off and putting on. It is likely that Paul uses it because it's something that we do at least a few times everyday and therefore becomes an apt illustration for the Christian of their daily pursuit of holiness.

Verse 10 - “You are being renewed in knowledge according to the image of your Creator. “

Paul is speaking of DIRECTION towards holiness in the Christian life and not already attained perfection. The act of putting off the old and putting on the new, is a continual process for the Christian. We are going to sin against God and against each other, but we are to repent and turn away from those things as we seek to mature as followers of Jesus.

[CLICK] Being an engineer I thought I would sneak in a graph, that shows the relationship between sin and Christian maturity.

In making us a new creation Jesus has radically changed us. He has changed us from the inside out. He has not improved us or made us a better moral people but made us a completely new being.

The result is a changed identity. **[CLICK]** This is not a mere upgrade from a Toyota to a Mercedes but being turned into something completely different – **a rocket!**

This new identity breaks down all barriers. **[CLICK]**

“¹¹ Here there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.”

In Galatians 3:28 Paul also includes male and female

Paul here is saying the gospel of Jesus Christ, which has made you a new creation, has torn down social, ethnic and economic barriers between us. The social diversity of all these different people groups is not important anymore. The ethnic and traditional backgrounds of these people do not matter. Their financial status is irrelevant.

When they stand before God, He sees sinners saved by Jesus - saved by His grace and marked by His righteousness. Christ is all that matters; Christ dwells in all

[CLICK] There is no greater example of this than the relationship of Philemon and Onesimus recorded here in the book of Colossians and then again in Philemon.

Tychicus was described as “faithful minister and fellow servant” who was with Paul during his first Roman imprisonment. He was entrusted to deliver Paul’s epistles to the Ephesians and Colossians. Accompanying him to the Colossian church was Onesimus, who was runaway slave who had wronged his owner Philemon. Philemon was a wealthy Christian and leader in the Colossian church, which was a house church that met in his own home.

Paul encourages Philemon to forgive Onesimus and accept him as a brother in Christ because they are both a new creation in Him. They are both equal in the sight of God. **The gospel** is the great equaliser of men. In an age where the secular world is obsessed with identity, diversity

and equality, I would argue that there is **no greater diversity and equality** than in the church.

If you don't believe me, take a moment to look around you – where else would you find people from Australia, New Zealand, Philippines, China, India, Chile, Canada and the United States? Have I missed anyone? Where else would you find people of all age groups – babies, toddlers, children, teenagers, young adults, parents, single, married, retirees and grandparents? Where else are you going to find engineers, IT practitioners, teachers, midwives, homemakers, quality officers, architects, professional photographers who have **nothing** else connecting them to each other **but they have a new identity in Jesus and they are united in Him.** Friends, the gospel is **THE GREAT** equaliser.

That is our identity – equal before God because of Jesus Christ. Jesus is everything and He is in everyone. He is in everyone because He gives us His Spirit. **[CLICK]**

I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever—¹⁷ the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. – John 14:v16-17

Remember how Paul said that Christians have an individual responsibility to put off the vices he mentions in v5-10. Well, Jesus does not leave us to do that on our own but He gives us His Holy Spirit, which not only convicts us but also gives us the power to overcome sin.

Our ethnic backgrounds, social and economic statuses do not matter here in this community. What is paramount is who Jesus is, what He has done for us and our identity in Him.

The first part of v12 tells us something more about our identities... **(CLICK)**

v12 "Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved"

Another reality of our new identity in Jesus is that we are now God's people. This truth is radical because in the Old Testament, the Jews were considered to be God's chosen people.

Have a look at...

Deuteronomy 7:6-8 (NIV)

⁶ For you are a people holy to the Lord your God. The Lord your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession.

⁷ The Lord did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other

peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. ⁸ But it was because the Lord loved you...'

God chose and set apart the Israelites so that He could make His ways known to the rest of world. But in Jesus now the Colossians are in a sense a new Israel. A new people of God - consisting not just of Jewish believers, but Gentiles as well. When did He choose them? Ephesians 1:4

4 For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight.

Before the world was formed He knew them and chose them.

Their holy identity was given to them freely through Jesus and not achieved through their own merits. God is holy and the Colossians were not. They are holy because God chose them and not because of anything we've done.

Through union with Christ, God has bestowed upon them His perfect righteousness and declared them holy.

Also, they are LOVED.

Just like Israel was loved as we read earlier in Deut 7v8, so were the Colossians.

God loved the Colossian believers, and He demonstrated His love by sending His only Son to die for them. God knew their vilest and most evil thoughts and saw them at their worst (sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, idolatry, anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language) and He loved them anyway.

Just like the Colossians, God chose us before time, made us holy through Jesus and loved us immensely by sending Him to die for us.

That brings us to our second point.

Radical Focus on others (v12b-14)

“clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.

13 *Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.*

14 And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.”

In v5 Paul instructs the Colossians to put to death a list of sins that are a part of their earthly bodies. He says, these sins are part of their pre-Christian lives. This first list is personal – it’s a list of sins you could say a person commits to themselves – to their minds, hearts, thoughts and bodies.

The second list in v8 – “anger, wrath, malice, slander, and filthy language from your mouth” is a list of sins we commit against each other. These vices are part of the old self – they cause disunity and conflict among people.

Now in v12-14 to, Paul gives a replacement list. It is not just enough to put off these vices, it needs to be replaced with new virtues. He is telling the Colossians there is no distinction amongst you, Jesus trumps everything, and He is in you through His Spirit. You are chosen, holy and

loved. This is your new identity. Now live a life that is consistent with your new identity.

You see, if I say and believe that I am healthy person, then my actions need to reflect my healthy identity. I cannot be lazy all day and stock up on junk food. I need to replace it with exercise and a nutritious diet. We need to replace our vices with virtues that reflect our identity.

We'll go through each virtue and I'll explain them briefly.

The first virtue Paul tells us to put on is “compassion” – (Gk. *splanchna*) literally meaning bowels of mercy.

Its what today's generation would call “in the feels”

[CLICK] It's the physiological response one would experience to an emotional feeling. Bowels expressed a deep longing compassion, which was experienced in a person's innermost being. It was often associated with the seat of emotions and especially with love. **[UNCLICK]**

The second virtue Paul encourages Christians to put on is “kindness”. Kindness is not just the generous act giving

someone your time, money or resources. It can be best described as not giving someone what they deserve, but **rather better than** they deserve. The Greek word translated kindness (Gk. chrestotes) describes wine that has grown mellow with age and has lost its harshness.

Next up Paul encourages us to wear humility (Gk. tapeinophrosyne) meaning meekness, lowliness. In the ancient world being humble was viewed with disapproval. It was often associated with being a coward or having a servant nature. In fact the Greeks had no symbol in their language to denote it. Every word associated with it had some element of meanness, weakness or disregard.

The next piece of clothing Paul wants us to have in our wardrobe is meekness. (Some translations say gentleness) The Gk is quite similar to humility but at the same time is subtly different. Gentleness is not weakness but rather strength that is self-controlled. It can

also be thought of as a quality of not being overly impressed by the sense of one's own self-importance.

The last virtue in this initial list is patience (Gk makrothymia).

One of the first characteristics of love in 1 Cor 13:4 is what? **[CLICK]** It is patient.

1 Corinthians 13:4 New International Version (NIV)

⁴ Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud.

Elsewhere in the NT Paul urges believers to be patient with one another.

Ephesians 4:2 New International Version (NIV)

² Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love

1 Thessalonians 5:14 New International Version (NIV)

¹⁴ And we urge you, brothers and sisters, warn those who are idle and disruptive, encourage the disheartened, help the weak, be patient with everyone.

The word patience can be described as long-suffering. This is the kind of person that regardless of how unfairly or poorly they are treated, they do not whine or get angry. Even if they unjustly sustain a loss – of time, energy, resources they do not complain. They are patient. They are long-suffering. They're not in a rush to have things happen right now, in their way, in their time. They are a person who has learned the art of waiting.

Now I want to stop there before I go any further. Did you notice anything about that section? Did you notice that Jesus Himself modeled these virtues to us in the greatest possible way and secondly that they are supremely focused on others. If you asked someone what the criteria of being a good person was they may rattle the usual

suspects – not stealing, murdering, causing harm to someone else. They may even have some of these virtues on their ‘good person’ list but perhaps not all. Even if they did, it would be in a self-seeking and self-indulgent way. To say “hey look at me, look at all these good things I’m doing.”

[CLICK] Brothers and sisters God and Jesus Himself is our greatest example to model these virtues. When God saw us in our sinful and helpless state, He was moved with compassion. His compassion resulted in His kindness towards us. God showed His kindness by not giving us what we deserved, which is His judgment for disobeying and rejecting Him, instead the punishment that we deserved for those offenses, He poured out on His own Son Jesus Christ who was nailed to a cross for our sin. Jesus who was the only perfect man to live died a cruel death to pay the penalty for you and me. Through Jesus we have God’s forgiveness but not just that – when God looks at us now He sees Jesus’ righteousness in us.

Jesus who as we saw several weeks ago when Jono preached from Colossians 1:15 was the image of the invisible God. He was present in the beginning with God and all things were created in Him, through Him and for Him. This Jesus humbled Himself to the point of taking human form and going to the cross for us who did not even acknowledge Him. He was not just humble in death but He washed the feet of those He was in community with.

Jesus was fully Sovereign and in control when He was beaten, mocked and nailed to cross yet chose to suffer the death that you and I deserved. He could have chosen to display His strength in that moment but instead chose to demonstrate His meekness. And lastly He is patient – He was patient when we rejected Him, even as new beings He is still patient with us as when we fall short sometimes and He is patient with an unbelieving world.

Jesus' model teaches us to value others above ourselves and not seek our own interests but pursue the good of others. These virtues are seen elsewhere in Paul's letters. **[CLICK]** In Eph 4:1-6 and Gal 5:22-23, the latter which we know as the fruits of the spirit. Paul is painting of picture of how believers who have been given new life are to live in community with one another.

Alright onto verse 13:

¹³ Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.

Some translations read bearing or forbearing and forgiving which implies that this is something we live out continually. It is not a once off or set and forget but a way of life for the Christian

Forbearing (Gk anechomenoi) is to bear with or endure.

It is the act of patiently putting up with or tolerating one another.

Many of us have heard stories of quarrels in churches and disputes over colors of walls, carpets, style of worship, temperature of building and so on. There is an article you can find online called 25 Silly Things Churches Fight Over. If you get a chance have a read of it online. It will certainly make you laugh but could also make you quite sad.

However I think a church like ours needs to be careful in more subtle areas of tolerance. Like putting up with one another over which political party we vote for, or whether we send our children to public schools or home school or whether we choose vaccinate our children or not. These are not Biblical or gospel issues so stop making them out to be like they are. Even topics such as end times theology, the style of songs we sing in church, whether or not we run a Sunday School – these are secondary or even tertiary issues and we are to patiently bear with one another in community.

One commentator summarises this really well.

“Forbearance acknowledges that every Christian fellowship is made up of all kinds of people and that we will accordingly find ourselves in close fellowship with people who are different. For the sake of maintaining community we need to put up with one another.”

Forgiveness – this is something that you would think came naturally to Christians as a result of **how much we’ve been forgiven by God through Jesus Christ.**

Yet we struggle to forgive. For a people who have been shown great forgiveness, sometimes we show very little of it. Don’t get me wrong - there are absolutely times when forgiveness is hard – when you’ve been victims of harsh actions, abuse or years for unfair or unjust treatment. But we ought to be reminded of the forgiveness extended to us by God, and one that He continues to show us.

If we are the offended party we should not withhold forgiveness. Imagine if God withheld forgiveness from us?

Even if the offender does not see their actions as sin and has not sought your forgiveness, we still should extend forgiveness anyway. For a Christian to be unforgiving is unthinkable. If we have offended another we should be quick to seek forgiveness.

Jesus not only gave us the model for forgiveness but He also made it possible to forgive. For a Christian therefore to be unforgiving is unChristlike.

¹⁴ And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

Love is the belt that holds all the layers together. As one commentator put it “love is the grace, which binds all. It’s the crowing grace of love.” We looked at Galatians 5:22-23 earlier, what is the first fruit of the Spirit in that list? It’s love.

Without Biblical love there can be no genuine compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. The other virtues cannot exist independent of love. Without Biblical

love these virtues are just good moral behaviours.

Christianity is not about moral behaviours. It is about Jesus and His radical love for us and how we live our lives with others as a result of that. Without love we seek to bring glory to ourselves rather than to Jesus. Biblical love is sacrificial just like the other virtues and is considerate of the other person first before yourself.

The Christian life is lived in community. These layers of clothing cannot be worn in isolation of one another. All these virtues point to being in relationship. It would be easy to be a hermit and stay away from people with different personalities and preferences. Then practicing gentleness, patience and forbearance would be simple.

Or how about isolating yourself unkind, inconsiderate or harsh people? Then it would be easy to practice kindness and forgiveness wouldn't it? But that's just not how this works is it? We have the privilege that despite our

differences, we do life together. We grow and mature as believers in community with one other.

Radical Christ focus – directed by His peace, instructed by His Word, motivated by His name (v15-17)

¹⁵ Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. ¹⁶ Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. ¹⁷ And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

V15 is primarily talking about the peace that should exist within people who are a part of Christ's body as the whole context of this passage is community. Paul reinforces the idea of community by saying since you are members of one body. And this peace between men has its foundation in the gospel and Christ securing peace between God and us. Once alienated and enemies of God. Now reconciled to God through Jesus Christ.

Paul is saying let this peace – the peace that Jesus has secured for you reign in your hearts as you do life with

fellow believers. The word rule here translates to arbiter or umpire. Just like in a game of sport an umpire or referee has the final say on decisions during a game, so Paul here is saying let the peace that you have experienced because of the gospel be the arbiter or let it have the final say when you have a conflict or quarrel amongst you. He is saying whenever there is a disunity amongst you let the peace of Christ and the gospel reign.

Remember back in v11 when Paul spoke of Scythians. I didn't explain who they were then. But prior to their conversion these people were known as notorious warriors. Their mantra was "fight to live and live to fight" and they would drink the blood of their enemies and use their scalps as napkins. **I mean you couldn't have peace with these guys even if you wanted to!** But the gospel changed that; it changed them and their relationships.

The words "in your heart" should not be glossed over either. When you think about conflict, quarrels or disunity,

which may stem from our list of anger, wrath, malice, slander, and filthy language – these are sins, which originate in your heart. When Jesus talks about the law and speaks about the sins of murder and lust, he goes straight to the heart issue. So these other sins stem from the heart as well before they ever become part of our speech or our actions.

v16 is interesting because it gives us a glimpse of worship in the early church. It perhaps even implies the teaching of God's Word and singing were important aspects of corporate worship. However I do not think that this verse is specifically about worship at all, because of the context of preceding verses and also because Paul in the very next verse speaks about the whole of life.

The message of Christ or the Word of Christ in other translations is likely the gospel message rather the referring explicitly to the Scriptures itself in continuing with the theme of gospel living and a life transformed into a

new creation. The word dwell means to settle or to live in. Imagine you or your family buy a house. It's an older house but as you live in it over the years you add your own individuality to it – you might renovate certain rooms or fix broken things. The longer you live in it, the more the house resembles your uniqueness.

In the same way the longer the gospel dwells within you, it transforms you from the inside out.

But maturing as a Christian does not happen in isolation either – its not enough to be a Christian by yourself with your Bible at home reading and praying to God. You are designed to be in community; unless of course you are in solitary imprisonment then you don't have a choice!

So therefore that maturing and indwelling of the gospel occurs in the context of community where you are taught and admonished. Presenting the truth of the gospel and warning about the pitfalls of wandering away from the truth. Let the gospel be the nucleus of your corporate

gathering – at the centre of your activities and your worship. Teaching and admonishing with (or in) all wisdom. The message of Christ is to dwell richly or translated lavishly in your lives. When outsiders look at this community consisting of new creations, they are to be astounded that every aspect of their relationships is marked by the gospel.

That wisdom is only going to come through maturing in Christ. It is the responsibility of every member to teach and admonish. Sure teaching within the church and the pulpit is reserved for certain people but in our homes, in our small groups, at coffee shops, in the park, over telephone we are to teach and admonish one another.

This is not teach and admonish in the sense that I'm holier than you but if the goal is to seek the good of the other, then it is to see them mature in the faith and life with Jesus as Paul says in Col 1:28.

The last verse - to do everything in the Jesus name. It is all encompassing. It includes all of life. It is easy to gloss over but it is worth pausing to reflect on. In our community, whatever you do whether you teach, preach, serve on music, on the audio visual ministry, in Sunday school, whether you mow the lawns or have been renovating the kitchen downstairs – do it all in the name of Jesus. Do not let sin sow the seed of disunity and cause division in the community. Do not do anything to sully the name of the one we follow. Do it all because of Him, by His power and for His glory.

Radical thankfulness (v15-17)

My last point and its is going to be very short is Radical Thankfulness. I could not skip this because thankfulness or the idea of gratitude is mentioned three times in these three verses. **[CLICK]** It is also a theme in the whole letter. Think about where Paul is when he's is writing this – he's in a Roman prison. By all accounts his circumstances were not great and two or three years after he wrote this

letter the Romans beheaded him on account of his faith. If anyone had a reason not to be thankful it would have been Paul and no one would begrudge him. Yet he is thankful. Thankful - in his circumstances for a community that he has never even met. Thankful that they know Jesus who has secured peace for them between God and between themselves.

Being in community within a church we can struggle to be thankful sometimes can we not? Preaching week in and week out, serving as an elder or deacon behind the scenes, doing AV ministry, being on worship – these can all seem like thankless jobs often, in turn quickly making us discouraged.

I trust that as Paul exhorts us, we would be would grateful for this community that God has placed us all in. Thankful for one another, despite our differences and flaws.

Conclusion

I want to close with this - it is a sad state when a community is divided by sin. When a community that Jesus Himself gave up His life for experiences disunity I am sure that God is grieved. No community can be perfect on this side of life, but as new creations in Christ, we can certainly work at being more like Him in our relationships with one another. Most of us have heard that Christian community is important and life giving, but community is also difficult and challenging. To build community and maintain it takes effort. It requires us to chip away at our own selfish needs and ambitions and put others before us. It requires being intentional but it is absolutely worth it – because when we thrive in our relationships it is a sure sign of our maturity in the faith. I trust that you have been encouraged and challenged to think about how we can be a radical community in Christ. May God use His transforming grace in our lives to become the people that the intended for us to be. Amen.

Home Group Questions

1. If someone asked you about your identity, how would you describe it to them? (vv11-12)
2. During the sermon we heard 'The Gospel is the great equaliser'. Discuss. (vv11)
3. Have you ever found yourself being impatient, unkind or even angry at a fellow brother or sister at church? How did you treat them in response?
4. Using Christ as our model, how might you respond differently in the future? (vv12)
5. In what aspects of church life do you think you could be more forbearing? (vv13)
6. In what ways does our church let the word/message of Christ dwell richly among us? (vv16) Are there any other ways we could improve in this?
7. Verse 17 is often a throw away thought/comment making many Christians. How could we make this a more intentional attitude in every day life and within our church community?
8. Why is thankfulness an important and overarching virtue when it comes to church community?
9. In what ways could you practice thankfulness (to God and others) in our church community? (vv15-17)