



July 24



## Building Community

Philip Yancey



*This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus. [Ephesians 3:6](#)*

**Read:** [Ephesians 2:19–3:11](#)

**Bible in a Year:** [Psalms 35–36](#); [Acts 25](#)

“Community” is the place where the person you least want to live with always lives, says Henri Nouwen. Often we surround ourselves with the people we *most* want to live with, which forms a club or a clique, not a community. Anyone can form a club; it takes grace, shared vision, and hard work to form a community.

The Christian church was the first institution in history to bring together on equal footing Jews and Gentiles, men and women, slaves and free. The apostle Paul waxed eloquent on this “mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God.” By forming a community out of diverse members, Paul said, we have the opportunity to capture the attention of the world and even the supernatural world beyond (Eph. 3:9–10).

In some ways the church has sadly failed in this assignment. Still, church is the one place I visit that brings together generations: infants still held in their mothers’ arms, children who squirm and giggle at all the wrong times, responsible adults who know how to act appropriately at all times, and those who may drift asleep if the preacher drones on too long.

If we want the community experience God is offering to us, we have reason to seek a congregation of people “not like us.”

*Lord, remind us that the church is Your work, and You have brought us together for Your good purposes. Help us extend grace to others.*

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**The man who lives in a small community lives in a much larger world. G. K. Chesterton**

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July 25



## What We Bring Back

David C. McCasland



*I was young and now I am old, yet I have never seen the righteous forsaken or their children begging bread.* [Psalm 37:25](#)

Read: [Psalm 37:1–6, 23–27](#)

Bible in a Year: [Psalms 37–39](#); [Acts 26](#)

John F. Burns spent forty years covering world events for *The New York Times*. In an article written after his retirement in 2015, Burns recalled the words of a close friend and fellow journalist who was dying of cancer. “Never forget,” his colleague said, “It’s not how far you’ve traveled; it’s what you’ve brought back.”

Psalm 37 could be considered David’s list of what he “brought back” from his journey of life, from shepherd to soldier and king. The psalm is a series of couplets contrasting the wicked with the righteous, and affirming those who trust the Lord.

“Do not fret because of those who are evil or be envious of those who do wrong; for like the grass they will soon wither” (vv. 1–2).

“The Lord makes firm the steps of the one who delights in him; though he may stumble, he will not fall, for the Lord upholds him with his hand” (vv. 23–24).

“I was young and now I am old, yet I have never seen the righteous forsaken or their children begging bread” (v. 25).

From our experiences in life, what has God taught us? How have we experienced His faithfulness and love? In what ways has the Lord’s love shaped our lives?

It’s not how far we’ve traveled in life, but what we’ve brought back that counts.

*Dear Lord, thank You for walking with me throughout my life. Help me to remember Your faithfulness.*

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**As the years add up, God’s faithfulness keeps multiplying.**

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July 26



## Out of the Deep

Kirsten Holmberg



*He reached down from on high and took hold of me. [2 Samuel 22:17](#)*

**Read:** [2 Samuel 22:17–20](#)

**Bible in a Year:** [Psalms 40–42](#); [Acts 27:1–26](#)

I scanned the water intently, on alert for signs of trouble. During my six-hour shifts as a lifeguard, I watched from the side of the pool to ensure the safety of those swimming. Leaving my post, or even becoming lax in my attentiveness, could have grave consequences for those in the pool. If a swimmer was in danger of drowning due to injury or lack of skill, it was my responsibility to pluck them from the water and return them to safety on the pool deck.

After experiencing God's aid in battle against the Philistines (2 Sam. 21:15–22), David likens his rescue to being drawn out of "deep waters" (22:17). David's very life—and that of his men—was in serious danger from his enemies. God buoyed David as he was drowning in disaster. While lifeguards are paid to assure the safety of swimmers, God, on the other hand, saved David because of His *delight* in him (v. 20). My heart leaps for joy when I realize that God doesn't watch over and protect me because He's obliged to but because He *wants to*.

When we feel overcome by the troubles of life, we can rest in the knowledge that God, our Lifeguard, sees our struggle and, because of His delight in us, watches over and protects us.

*Thank You, Lord, for seeing my struggles and standing ready to save me. Help me to trust Your rescuing love more fully.*

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**God delights in saving His children.**

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July 27



## Sweet Company

Anne Cetas



*The Spirit of truth . . . lives with you and will be in you.* [John 14:17](#)

Read: [John 14:15–26](#)

Bible in a Year: [Psalms 43–45](#); [Acts 27:27–44](#)

The elderly woman in the nursing home didn't speak to anyone or request anything. It seemed she merely existed, rocking in her creaky old chair. She didn't have many visitors, so one young nurse would often go into her room on her breaks. Without asking the woman questions to try to get her to talk, she simply pulled up another chair and rocked with her. After several months, the elderly woman said to her, "Thank you for rocking with me." She was grateful for the companionship.

Before He went back to heaven, Jesus promised to send a constant companion to His disciples. He told them He would not leave them alone but would send the Holy Spirit to be in them (John 14:17). That promise is still true for believers in Jesus today. Jesus said that the triune God makes His "home" in us (v. 23).

The Lord is our close and faithful companion throughout our entire life. He will guide us in our deepest struggles, forgive our sin, hear each silent prayer, and shoulder the burdens we cannot bear.

We can enjoy His sweet company today.

*Dear Lord, thank You for giving us Your Spirit as our constant companion.*

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**The Christian's heart is the Holy Spirit's home.**

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July 28



## Forgiven!

David H. Roper



*I have strayed like a lost sheep. Seek your servant. [Psalm 119:176](#)*

**Read:** [1 John 1:1-10](#)

**Bible in a Year:** [Psalms 46–48](#); [Acts 28](#)

My friend Norm Cook sometimes had a surprise for his family when he arrived home from work. He would walk through the front door, and shout, “You’re forgiven!” It wasn’t that family members had wronged him and needed *his* forgiveness. He was reminding them that though they doubtless had sinned throughout the day, they were by God’s grace fully forgiven.

The apostle John supplies this note about grace: “If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin. If we claim to be without sin [no inclination to sin], we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:7–9).

To “walk in the light” is a metaphor for following Jesus. Imitating Jesus with the Spirit’s help, John insists, is the sign that we have joined with the apostles in the fellowship of faith. We are authentic Christians. But, he continues, let’s not be deceived: We will make wrong choices at times. Nevertheless, grace is given in full measure: We can take what forgiveness we need.

Not perfect; just forgiven by Jesus! That’s the good word for today.

*Lord, I know I’m not even close to being perfect. That’s why I need You and Your cleansing in my life. I’m lost without You.*

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**Monitor your heart daily to avoid wandering from God’s wisdom.**

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