



**United**

Reflections on  
partnership  
in the Bible

# United

## Reflections on partnership in the Bible

Highlighting the power and purpose of partnerships in scripture—life is better when we partner with each other, and with God.

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# Introduction:

## SWEET AND FRAGRANT UNITY



**'How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity! It is like precious oil poured on the head, running down on the beard, running down on Aaron's beard, down on the collar of his robe. It is as if the dew of Hermon were falling on Mount Zion. For there the Lord bestows his blessing, even life forevermore.'—Psalm 133**

What a promise! Abundant life is found when the people of God live together in unity. This Psalm is a vivid picture of the beauty of people living together—not in a state of constant agreement but unity.

The biblical vision of unity appears to be one of harmony rather than homogeneity. Multiple parts, playing multiple roles—a body, a choir, a chord of multiple strands. The image of God in his human creation is displayed in the fullness of our diversity. And we experience more of God in our human experience

when we partner with our image-bearing brothers and sisters.

In this short devotional series, you'll hear from different members of our Baptist World Aid team including our CEO, our Better World Ambassador and members of our Church Partnerships and Communication Teams. As we are an organisation made up of many parts, and many voices, we wanted to bring a few together here to reflect on partnerships we see highlighted in the bible.

Each reflection dives into a different collaboration: men and women, the divine collaboration between God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the collaborative design of the body of Christ, the very tangible benefits of partnerships, and models of partnership evident in the New and Old Testaments.

Thank you for joining with us, partnering in God's Kingdom and in his story of restoration.

## **Dig Deeper:**

Each reflection is followed by some questions to consider, or discuss, as well as a prayer you can use as a guide.



## **Prayer:**

Lord Jesus, as you invite us to consider what it means to collaborate with you in creating a better world for all, would you open our hearts and minds to how you might be inviting us into a deeper partnership with one another and with you today.

# Equally Made, Equally Valuable:

## MEN AND WOMEN FLOURISH IN PARTNERSHIP

By **Melissa Lipsett**

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The partnership of women and men together in God's mission has often got a bad rap. Perhaps understandably so given the fragility of human behaviour.

Much of our world is hostile to women and girls, seeing them as second-class citizens with little or no value beyond child rearing, domestic servitude, and physical labour.

But when women and girls can't participate economically or in decision making, it's not just they who suffer. Their families suffer, their communities and nations are restricted in their

social and economic progress, and the world is a lesser place.

It's important then, that we understand what the Bible has to say about women, and about men and women together.

*'Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness..." So God created man (human beings) in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.'* (Genesis 1:26-27)

This is the most exalted view of humanity anyone could imagine—that we're made in the image of

God. Furthermore, God's first word about women completely shatters the notion that boys are more valuable than girls. He gives both the same identity and, in the very next verses, the same responsibilities by entrusting his creation to them both.

This view of women as equal with men is supported again and throughout scripture. Deborah, Esther, Miriam, Hannah, Rahab, Jael and Abigail are just some of the incredibly important people in God's mission. And the reality of the Proverbs 31 woman as the epitome of wisdom describes someone who's strong, smart, and astute as well as one who loves justice fiercely.

But these stories where women are featured are not a win for woman and a loss for men. In fact, these stories result in mutual flourishing.

The Bible contains so many examples of God esteeming, calling and using women and men together as image bearers of God. When we look for ways to actively work together, whole families and communities flourish, the church is richer, our mission is expanded, the world is a better place, and the Kingdom of God is unlimited by a small vision of God's calling on our lives and partnerships.

## Dig Deeper:

**1** What are some of the male/female partnerships we see in the Bible? What is it that unites them?

**2** How does seeing all people as made in the image of God affect the way we see marginalised women and girls around the world?

**3** What can you do in your own family or church to make space for women and men to work in partnership for God's glory?



## Prayer:

Father, thank you for making each of us in your image, with dignity and value. As women and men who love and serve you, please help us to honour and serve each other too, as equals. We pray especially for women and girls around the world who are undervalued today. Please help us challenge this injustice and seek restoration of all people to fullness of life.

# Ruth & Naomi:

## A PARTNERSHIP OF EQUALS

By Erica Noonan



**“But Ruth replied, 'Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God.'”—Ruth 1:16**

### Read Ruth 1-4

The book of Ruth is a story of devoted friendship. Set against the backdrop of war and conflict, it's surprising because it's not about war, but ordinary women and their faithfulness to God and one another.

Ruth is more than a happily-ever-after love story, it's a tale of love and commitment. The Book of Ruth lets us know that God cares about the lives of everyday people, including those who are vulnerable, and far from the family of God. It shows the beauty of supporting one another, and how together we can achieve more than we can on our own. Ruth, the Moabite, shows

an unexpected loyalty to her mother-in-law, Naomi, when she accompanies her in her return to Bethlehem. Ruth travels with Naomi and supports her financially by gathering barley in Boaz's field. Sticking with Naomi, Ruth vastly improves her life—helping protect her safety, caring for her, and later when Ruth and Boaz have a son, Naomi's hope in God is restored.

**God used Ruth, a foreigner far from the family of God, to bring about God's purposes and plans in Naomi's life.**

And then, God blesses Ruth's life. Through Naomi, and then Boaz, Ruth is accepted into God's family.



Not just for the moment, but for generations to come. When Ruth has a son, Obed, Ruth becomes part of direct lineage of Jesus (Obed is the grandfather of King David).

Ruth is a beautiful story of mutual flourishing within faithful friendships.

Through our local Christian Partners, Baptist World Aid provides opportunities for women and men to work together, in support of one another. Women like Mina, who once was shy and reserved, and is now a leader and inspiration to the women in her community in Nepal.

Our Partners have often observed that particularly the women they serve not only learn skills themselves—such as pathways to secure livelihoods, health and hygiene, animal husbandry—but generously share them with others.

In fact, if you teach a woman to read, on average, they teach five additional people to read. Women often teach other women, children, and men, what they know. So, supporting women is a wonderful investment that increases exponentially, and the impacts continue for generations.

## Dig Deeper:

**1** Why do you think Ruth went with Naomi to Bethlehem? Can you think of other stories of women supporting women in the Bible or in life?

**2** What are some key themes in this story? Is this a story of friendship, love, genealogy, inclusion or the sovereignty of God?

**3** Can you think of some people who are vulnerable or far from the family of God? Pause to pray for them as well as those who Baptist World Aid works with in countries such as Bangladesh, Nepal, Cambodia and Uganda.

## Prayer:

Lord, help us to help one another like Ruth helped Naomi. Thank you for your faithfulness to us in all situations, and that we can trust you, no matter what. Help us to trust you and share your hope with those that are far from you.

# The Body Beautiful:

## THE CHURCH AS BODY

By Heather Keith



**'Speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.'**—Ephesians 4:15-16

Are you the busy fingers attending to the many little tasks a church generates, or are you a hip joint, helping the church take important steps by encouraging people to work together? Maybe you're more of an ear—patiently taking in information and sending it on so that others can act. Or an internal organ, whose work is rarely seen, but is nonetheless a crucial part of the Church.

Throughout Scripture, the image of a human body is used often to describe the Church. It's a visceral reminder that we were made to work in partnership and rely on each other—just like a human body—as part of God's mission of restoration. Paul especially labours the

point, extending the metaphor to the point of absurdity:

*'The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!" And the head cannot say to the feet, "I don't need you!" On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable.'*  
(1 Corinthians 12:21-22)

There is a rare medical condition known as Xenomelia or 'foreign limb syndrome' whereby an individual becomes convinced that a healthy body part does not belong to them. Some seek to have it cut off because it offends them so much, but this could leave them with a permanent and unnecessary disability. Likewise, when Christian

communities cut away members who 'don't belong', or stop valuing brothers and sisters equally, we're working against God's good design and miss out on the beauty of a united form where everyone has a role. There are no 'foreign limbs' in God's body. We belong to, and with, each other.

*'There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.'* (Galatians 3:28)

It's good to remember that God cares about unity. But unity doesn't mean everyone has to have all the same thoughts, tastes, or opinions—following the risen Jesus together is enough to make us family.

And we are very different! Especially when we're talking about the worldwide Church, not our individual churches. Our work at Baptist World Aid sees us collaborating with a variety of Christian Partners around the world to bring justice and relief to the millions living in poverty. If we let our differences divide us, our mission would suffer.

It isn't always easy or natural, but a united body works together and values every member despite our differences, and it's stronger for it. And it's always worth remembering that our beautiful body belongs to Christ.

## Dig Deeper:

**1** What does it look like when a church isn't behaving as a united body? What is the danger?

**2** Do we each have personal responsibility for maintaining unity within the Church? How?

**3** What are your church's struggles in this area? How can you act or pray towards healing?



## Prayer:

Father, thank you for making us a family of believers. Where there is strife among us, please bring peace so that we can care for each other and stay focussed on your mission. Please give us humility, grace and love to help us stay united and honour you. Amen.

# The Big Picture:

## LOVING RELATIONSHIP WITHIN GOD

By Kerry Hilton

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Do you find it easier to relate to Jesus than to the Father and the Holy Spirit? After all, Jesus is God with skin on. He came as a baby, lived among us, walked our streets. He's the one we call Immanuel, God with us. We can be confident that what we see in Jesus is consistent with who the Father is. To use everyday words, Jesus is 'a chip off the old block.'

*We saw the glory with our own eyes, the one-of-a-kind glory, like Father, like Son. Generous inside and out, true from start to finish. (John 1:1b, The Message, paraphrase)*

The truth of the matter is this, we miss a whole lot of God when we

view God as three individuals with separate personalities. Rather than starting with one to understand the three (Trinity), perhaps it's better to start with the dynamic relationship *within* God, the Trinity.

Way back in the 13th Century, German theologian and mystic, Meister Eckhart described the relationship he experienced with God.

'The Father laughs with the Son, the Son laughs with the Father; the Father likes the Son, the Son likes the Father; the Father delights in the Son, the Son delights in the Father; the Father loves the Son, the Son

loves the Father. This laughing and liking and delighting and loving of God, is God the Holy Spirit!

It blows my mind to think that God wants the same kind of relationship with us. That we are invited into this dynamic partnership.

*'The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighbourhood.'*  
(John 1:14, The Message, paraphrase)

Could it be that God's whole motivation to live among us was to draw us all into this *'laughing and liking and delighting and loving relationship within God'*? As image bearers of God, do you think that this is what God always intended for us? I do.

There is an eternal partnership between God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit that we've been invited into, alongside and in partnership with one another. What an experience!

It's easy to get fixated on Jesus coming to save the world and yet miss the reason—the bigger reason of why—to draw us in to relationship within God, and into community with one another.

## Dig Deeper:

**1** What's your relationship with God like? Is there friendship, and reverence, or distance?

**2** How does the way we relate to God help us understand the relationship within the Trinity?

**3** How does God's desire for relationship with you impact the way you relate to others?



## Prayer:

Thank you God, three in one, for drawing us in to your laughing, liking, delighting, and loving relationship. As image bearers of God, help us to see in ourselves what you see is us so we can laugh with, like, delight in, and love others as you do.

# A Cord Of Three Strands:

## LIFE IS BETTER IN PARTNERSHIP

By Sophia Russell

Read Ecclesiastes 4:9-12



Andriy was pastoring a small church in Kyiv, Ukraine, when the war started and forced his family to move. Around him, people who lost their homes desperately needed shelter, food, and basic items. Andriy wanted to help, but on his own, the task felt impossible.

Have you ever felt daunted by the problems of the world? According to the book of Ecclesiastes, you're not alone.

Written during the time of King Solomon, Ecclesiastes' main character, simply known as *the Teacher*, ruminates about the futility of life under the sun. He laments the injustice he sees: 'I saw the tears of the oppressed, and they have no

comforter (4:11)!' But the Teacher doesn't leave us without hope.

In the face of such turmoil, he offers some wise advice. 'Two,' he says, 'are better than one' (4:9). At first glance, it seems like the Teacher is expressing the joy of doing life with others, but this isn't all he has in mind. The companionship he speaks of is about co-labouring—working together to achieve a common cause.

This partnership is expressed in a few different ways. Firstly, the Teacher describes labourers working together to see a 'good return' for their efforts (4:9). He then describes the value of partnership in hard times. When you fall down, you have

someone to help you up (4:10). In extreme weather, two bodies can better stay warm (4:11). And when conflict strikes, 'two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken' (4:12).

When we partner with each other, we're more productive and resilient. Adversity is more likely to be overcome as under God, we can achieve more together than we can apart.

This is certainly true for Andriy. After his family relocated, he learned that one of Baptist World Aid's Christian Partners was looking for someone to distribute food and necessities to people in need. The items had been procured through donations from Christians around the world, eager to help.

Andriy secured a warehouse in Mukachevo to store the items, and then transported them to Kiyiv. From there, Christian volunteers delivered the items to vulnerable families.

By the end of 2022, around 300,000 people across Ukraine received these packages, all because God's people worked together. It was a cord of not just three strands, but hundreds of thousands. In partnership with others, we can meet hard times with hope. How can you partner with someone facing adversity today?

## Dig Deeper:

**1** Ecclesiastes 4:12 says that 'a cord of three strands is not quickly broken.' Have there been times in your life when facing hardships was easier because of the support you received? Spend some time thanking God for the people he has put in your life.

**2** Are there ways you can support others when they face adversity?

**3** Are there ways you can partner with others—whether it's other Christians or Christian organisations—to help people in their time of need?

## Prayer:

Lord God, help us to seek out ways to work together to address the pain and brokenness in our world. Surprise us Jesus with the ways you work in us and through us as we work together. Bring us into deeper joy and unity as we follow you together into our broken world. Amen.

# Two By Two:

## JESUS' MODEL FOR PARTNERING TOGETHER IN THE GOSPEL

By Meredith Benson



**'And he called the twelve and began to send them out two by two and gave them authority over the unclean spirits.'—Mark 6:7**

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### Read Matthew 10:1-8

I've always found the disciples of Jesus deeply relatable. They're young (I was young once), they're passionate but sometimes foolhardy, committed but often confused, they're a diverse group but they got to be on Jesus' 'team' despite, or maybe because of their human frailty. They were his companions on difficult journeys, and they bore witness to the fully God/fully man experience of his life on earth as Immanuel, *God with us*.

He surely didn't need to, but Jesus chose to pull together a team.

And to teach them how to work in partnership and unity even in difficult circumstances. And by doing so with this motley crew, he continues to teach us how, and why, we can work together.

In Mark, Jesus breaks the team into six partnerships. It's not the first or last time he does this. While we don't know who got to go with who, I like to imagine the idea of Matthew and Simon the Zealot being paired up.

These two men could not have come from a more different context. Matthew a tax collector, a colluder with the Roman Empire. And Simon,



a Zealot—a radical, anti-empire activist who hated everything Matthew (used to) represent. Would Jesus have tried to keep these two apart or would they have been a dramatic embodiment of his later statement, 'by this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.' (John 13:1)

In the broad church that is God's Kingdom, we encounter all kinds of modern-day disciples with a wide range of backgrounds, politics, and views. It can feel overwhelming. And the temptation is to withdraw to a corner of the Kingdom populated by those who think and feel like us. But Jesus would call us to draw nearer still, and *partner* with those who might differ from us on so much but with whom we share a devotion to Christ and his kingdom come here on earth.

If Matthew and Simon could be on the same team, surely any partnership is possible. When we set aside the agendas of the world and lean into our shared love of Jesus, and devotion to his people, we too can show the world that we are his disciples.

## Dig Deeper:

**1** Have you ever been paired up with someone who's views, or background makes it hard to work together? How did you overcome this?

**2** Why do you think Jesus sent the disciples out two by two? What can we learn from this model of partnership?

**3** Can you think of any other unlikely partnerships (like Simon and Matthew) in the Bible, or in our world today? How can we encourage unlikely partnerships in our communities?

## Prayer:

Lord Jesus, we want to be like you and we want to display your likeness in our world. Help us to be your disciples in our love for one another. And when you call us to work with those who are different from us, help us grow in grace and enter into deeper transformation and growth in our walk with you. Amen.



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