

GATHER

WOMEN'S NEWSLETTER FROM  IMMANUEL BIBLE CHURCH



United Around Christ

Do you remember 9/11? Some of you reading this may have been young, so your memory of it may be fuzzy. But for many like me, we remember exactly where we were and what we were doing when that horrific day began to unfold. We also remember thinking how some things would change forever after that tragic day in our nation's history.

In many ways, it feels similar following the COVID pandemic and we have certainly seen changes. People who never could work from home before COVID now regularly telework. Families who never considered homeschooling now school all or part of their kids at home. The list could go on.

One of the positive changes we have seen at Immanuel, though, has been our growth. Since the pandemic, we have welcomed many new faces. We have added back in another service and our membership classes have exploded. This has truly been a somewhat unexpected but wonderful outcome following the pandemic.

As we see the church grow and see shifts in how people live, work, and school, I have been reminded of the importance and centrality of love and unity in the church body. Ephesians 4:16-17 says:

Rather speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into Him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together with 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.

Notice that this short passage talking about the body of Christ begins and ends with love. We are both to speak and grow in love. While we are exhorted to speak truth, it is always to be done in love, and love will temper and even guide when and how we speak. We are also exhorted to grow up in every way

into Christ, but the result of this growth should be that we are built up in love.

In the middle of the passage, we see that we are "joined and held together." This points to the fact that we are ONE body in Christ and our body should be characterized by love.

The opening verses in Ephesians 4 highlight the importance of this unity:

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. There is one body and one Spirit of peace, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

We are one body, united together. And what are we united around? It is not our work or employment, our marital status, our schooling choice, or even our ethnicity. As believers chosen by God and placed into this church body, we are to be united around Christ.

If this is true, it should mean that life in our church family will be characterized by love and unity. It means I will not only be friends with or come alongside women in the church who look just like me or do the same things I do. It means I will be open to opportunities to serve women outside my comfortable circle. It means I will exercise humility and discernment before speaking truth to others. If you didn't notice, I am preaching to myself.

Sisters, as we begin a new ministry year, this is a wonderful opportunity to grow in love and unity within the church. Let's seek to be united around Christ alone and built up in love. Serving with love,

— Bethany



Reflections on Around the Table

By Marci Heppner and Cindy Sigsbee

Marci's Experience

I absolutely love being in people's homes and having people over to my home. I also love breakfast! So when I saw the Women's Ministry was organizing a breakfast in various homes, I was thrilled!

The verse that came in the email invitation to my hostess' home was the IBC Women's Ministry theme verse for 2022-2023, Hebrews 10:24-25—"And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near."

I was so glad to see a few people I already knew were going to be in my group, since I'm somewhat of a shy person when I'm around people I don't know. I was also glad to see there were people in the group I didn't know, so I could get to know more of the faces I see each week. In a church as big as IBC, Sunday mornings can be a bit daunting! Saturday morning helped me get to know seven other women in a smaller setting and spend time laughing with them. Proverbs 17:22 calls a joyful heart good medicine, and we had extremely good medicine on May 6!

It was so encouraging to find connections with each of the women around the table. Some of my fondest memories growing up are about visiting grandparents and family members, and the conversations, stories, and laughter we share as we sat at the table. Here I was, sitting with my sisters in Christ, sharing and laughing.

While in another country, they were celebrating the coronation of a king, we were celebrating how the King of Kings brought us together to share a meal and spend time encouraging each other.

We talked about where we could be seen around IBC, and I was certainly encouraged to see how many different ways the ladies were serving in the church. We also talked a bit about our backgrounds and how we ended up at IBC. We talked about favorite books, best places for high tea, collections, and favorite ways to spend our free time. I found out that one of the women lived in another country for a while, and I had an immediate connection with her simply because I grew up in another country.

I am amazed at how God brought us all to IBC in such different ways. So many other little connections were made, but the one thing connecting us all was an even stronger bond through our Savior Jesus Christ. We really do serve an amazing God.

Cindy's Experience

In her book, *Messy Beautiful Friendship*, Christine Hoover says that “the goal of friendship is to secure ourselves to the sure, steadfast anchor of Christ and, while holding to that anchor, give and receive the gift of friendship as we have **opportunity**.”

I'm so grateful to be a part of such a remarkable community at IBC that paves the way for opportunities to make meaningful friendships like this. Opportunities to serve others. Opportunities to sit under rich teaching. Opportunities to grow in my understanding of who God is. Opportunities to challenge one another. And opportunities for friendship and fellowship with other believers.

I had the privilege of helping facilitate one of the ***Around the Table*** gatherings back in May. Our time together was full of laughter, smiles, encouraging conversation, and, of course, Kathy Holley's amazing tea set up (to celebrate the Coronation happening that day in England). We passed around a mug and pulled out pieces of papers with questions on it. We took turns answering surface level questions like, “What is your favorite time of day and why?” As well as some deeper questions like, “Why did you decide to make Immanuel your church home?” or “What is God teaching you about Himself right now?”

I learned so much about the women I met and learned even more about the women that I already knew. The conversation was lively until the last question was answered and everyone was quiet.

One thing you should know about me is that I would rather touch a snake than sit in awkward silence with a room full of people looking at me. I'm just saying, Satan was a serpent. Anyway... as the facilitator, the seconds that ticked by seemed to last minutes, and I tried to think of something else to do to fill the remaining time.

That's when one of the women piped up and asked a question more helpful than any of the ones in the mug, "So, what was the point of this?" She further explained that she desired to be in deeper community and wanted to maintain fellowship with us. Most of us live(d) in the Burke/Springfield area, and she challenged us to pursue continued relationships with one another. Even as I write this, I am reminded of her challenge to us, to me, to pursue community like this—community outside of our typical, niche groups.

Friendship and fellowship, as the Lord intended, is not the same group of people getting together week after week, never changing, never growing. And, as I was reminded of that day, it's also not simply a gathering once a year where we learn briefly about each other and then move on to the next soccer practice or the next music recital. That very well may be how it begins, but let us look to one passage in Hebrews to help us determine where it should go from there.

Hebrews 10:24-25 — "And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near."

That is what we should strive to do with others in the body of Christ! I'm so grateful for the ways that IBC, and specifically the Women's Ministry, seeks to shepherd us through events like ***Around the Table***. This has shown me the importance of why faithful community is not only necessary, but helpful in my continued pursuit of the Lord.





Each Part Working Properly

By Sarah Fite

Sixteen weeks into my pregnancy with my son, I stepped wrong going down the stairs on my way to work and promptly found myself flat on the floor. It quickly became apparent I had injured my right foot or ankle in some capacity, and I would not be driving to work that day.

After calling my OB and husband and emailing my office, I googled how to wrap an ankle, because it had been just that long since I'd needed an ace bandage.

Later, after a FaceTime call with my ER nurse of a sister, who suspected the issue might be my foot not my ankle, my husband and I headed to urgent care. An absurdly long wait and series of x-rays later, the doctor confirmed my sister's suspicions—**my fall had broken my foot. Really broken my foot.**

The following day, an orthopedist confirmed this was a serious break that would take 12-16 weeks to heal under normal circumstances. Thanks to a little baby sucking up a good bit of the calcium in my body, it wasn't until 20 weeks later, a mere four weeks before my due date, that I finally got clearance to take the boot off for good and return to life as normal. (As normal as life can be while 36 weeks pregnant.)

In addition to this, I've experienced many injuries throughout my life. I've had multiple foot surgeries, and strained, sprained, twisted, or pulled just about every joint, muscle, or ligament possible. Anyone who's had experiences like mine—be it a broken bone, a twisted ankle, or even a stuffy nose—knows how frustrating it can be when some part of your body, however big or small, isn't working like it's supposed to work.

You learn to compensate, sometimes through conscious choices like breathing through your mouth or using your non-dominant hand to write and eat. Other times, your body compensates for you, the strong knee taking on the bulk of weight so the weak knee has a chance to rest and heal.

We know how frustrating it is when some part of our individual body doesn't work properly, but have we ever considered the impact on a different body—the body of Christ—when each part isn't working like it's supposed to?

Throughout the epistles, Paul repeatedly likens the Church to the body of Christ. In his letters to the Corinthians, Romans, Colossians, and Ephesians, he reminds us that, in the same way a body is made up of fingers, toes, eyes, ears, and a nose, the body of Christ is also made up of many different parts (ie. individuals) with many different gifts, talents, and roles to play in making the body function as God intended it to function.

We talk about this concept often enough and refer broadly to being “part of the body,” but have we ever stopped to consider what causes dysfunction and division in a body that Scripture repeatedly admonishes to be unified... and whether we might be part of the problem?

In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul dives deep into this metaphor:

For the body does not consist of one member but of many... If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you,” nor again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.” On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor... But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another.

What Paul is encouraging is clear—

in the same way God formed and fashioned our individual physical bodies with intention and care and without mistake, so too has He formed and fashioned the body of Christ.

The gifts and talents He individually gave us were just as intentional and without mistake as our eye color, shoe size, or height. The roles we have to play within our local church community are not arbitrary or as replaceable as we might be tempted to think.

Depending on the gifts you have and the roles you fulfill, this may be an easy or a difficult pill to swallow. It can be easy to feel envy for those who've received “stronger” or “more honorable” roles within the church, and hard to feel grateful for the “weaker” or “less honorable” roles.

Weak or strong, more honorable or less honorable, you may wish you had a different role to play in the body. If given to stage fright, you may be frustrated God has called you to a role that puts you in front of large groups of people. If a naturally charismatic person, you may be frustrated God has called you to a role that exists behind the scenes.

Regardless of the role, Paul makes it clear that every part of the body is essential to its proper working. In Ephesians 4:11-16, he puts it this way:

And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom 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.

It's probably easy to agree that we would all love to see the body of Christ build itself up in love, especially in light of the division and difficulty of the last few years. That happens, Paul says, "when each part is working properly."

This means each of us humbly accepting the role we've been given—however much we may or may not want it—and doing it unto the Lord. It means figurative eyes seeing, figurative ears hearing, and figurative mouths speaking. Doing so is obedience to the Lord and care for our fellow sisters in Christ, for when we refuse to do our part in equipping the body, the rest of the body suffers.

When one knee is out of commission, the other knee has to work that much harder to keep a body upright. When one ear is out of commission, the other has to work that much harder to hear what's going on around it. Only when each part is working as it should does the body "grow so that it builds itself up in love."

So, sisters, as we step into a new ministry year, consider this: what part do you play in the body of Christ? What gifts and talents has the Lord given you? What season of life has He placed you in? What role may He be calling you to... whether you'd choose it or not?

May we all prayerfully consider these questions, seeking wisdom from the Lord for the exact part He has given us to play in this body of believers, that, as Paul says, "we may grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ."

Fix Your Eyes by Amy Gannett

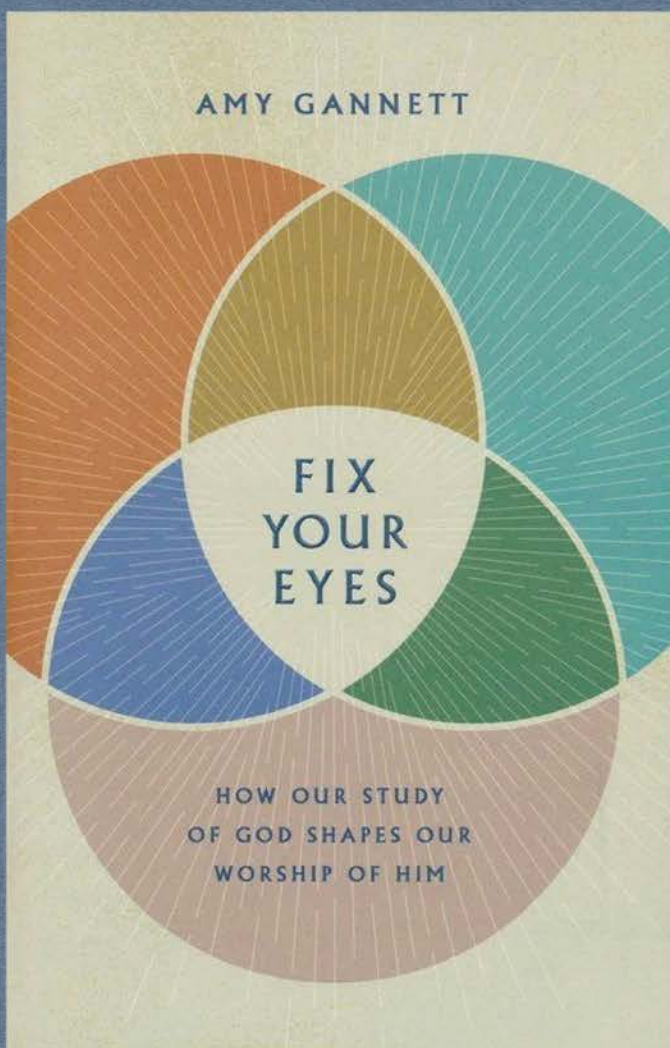
By Becky Evans

When I first found out I was pregnant with my daughter, I loved her right away. There was an immediate connection from the time I first felt her kick in my belly and then that connection and love grew when I saw her face after birth. That love and connection has only grown deeper as she has gotten older and I have come to know her as a person even more. The same is true with my sons. The same is true with most relationships we have in this world. As we learn more about a person we already love, that love deepens. So why would we think it is any different with our perfect God of the universe?

When I first saw the title to this book— *Fix Your Eyes* —I wrongly assumed it was another book about looking toward God instead of the things of this world in order to get a right focus on life. This book is so much more than that though. The author takes a look at how we see and study God and how that affects how we worship Him—basically the more we know about God, the more it should propel us into a deeper worship and awe of Him.

The author points out that a lot of times, we as Christians tend to lean more towards learning theology to grow our mind or understanding... or we lean more towards worship in an emotional sense. In reality, these two leanings should be brought





together. Our theology should bring us to greater worship of God as our understanding of God increases. Her book takes a dive into eight areas of theology, devoting a chapter to each topic:

1. *Theology Proper - Worshiping the God Who Is*
2. *The Trinity*
3. *Christology - Study of Christ*
4. *Pneumatology - Study of the Spirit*
5. *Soteriology - Study of the God who saves (union with Christ)*
6. *Bibliology - Study of the Bible*
7. *Ecclesiology - Study of the body of Christ - the church*
8. *Eschatology - Study of end times*

She takes each of these topics, dives into them in great explanation while using everyday metaphors from life to help explain, then demonstrates how the knowledge of these should fuel and make our worship greater.

As she says, “we all have some set of beliefs when it comes to God. And **those beliefs matter**. They matter because they form and inform a thousand tiny decisions we make every day, and because they underline one great big reality in our lives: what we make of God.” If we don’t know what we believe, then we allow our emotions and the world to modify or change our beliefs.

When we allow the world, circumstances, or emotions to influence what we believe the Bible says, we run into trouble. “Christians profess that we believe in the God of the Bible, not the God of our imaginations or the God we prefer, or the God other people have painted for us. And if we believe in the God of the Bible, this means we have to stop and ask ourselves: is our view of God the view that the Scriptures proclaim from Genesis to Revelation? Or does it more closely resemble our own traditions, upbringing, values, and social circles?”

As I was reading this book, it reminded me of another book I had read recently. That book was *Becoming Free Indeed* by Jinger Duggar Vuolo. In that book, Jinger describes how, as she became older, she had to disentangle the lies she learned growing up from the true character of God and salvation as rightly applied in Scripture.

Although my own growing up was not to the extent of rules or twisting of Scripture that Jinger grew up with, I can see in my own life how things teachers or others told me or circumstances that arose shaped how I have viewed God or my faith over time. That view did not always align accurately with Scripture. **It is so important that we act as Bereans and compare our feelings and what others teach us to what God’s Word has actually said.** God came down to us in word and action through Scripture and through sending His Son. What a privilege that is! And again, what better reason to worship Him! He reached out to us for us to know Him!

As Amy Gannett says, “Worship is what happens when what we love shapes us, when we submit our character, choices, wills, and ways to God, out of love and reverence for him. Worship is love for God, that seeks to obey, honor, praise, and adore him; it is setting the eyes of our hearts on him in love, and responsively lifting our faces toward him in awe and affection.”

May all of us grow deeper in our knowledge and understanding of God’s character and ways, not just to have that head knowledge, but for it to penetrate our heart and lives and result in an outpouring of worship to Him!



WOMEN'S MINISTRY

Mission Statement:

Encouraging all women to be
faithful followers of Christ who:

READ • LOVE • OBEY & PROCLAIM

God's Word



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