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CRUCIFORM COLLABORATION

*A Biblical Theology of Collaboration
Between Organizations*

Written by Valerie Hamilton and Tsega Tilahun

With Bruce Wilson and Michael Ortiz

GLOBAL ALLIANCE FOR CHURCH MULTIPLICATION

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THE PAPER

ABSTRACT

This study argues that collaboration is grounded in biblical theology. A macro-storyline related to collaboration is traced throughout Scripture, demonstrating that collaboration was built into the created order, distorted by the Fall, and transformed by Jesus. Through embracing *koinōnia*, organizations are able to see themselves as a small part of God's larger kingdom, collaborating within a *cruciform* value system where they are willing to lose what they have for the sake of his kingdom. It is suggested that cruciform partnerships involve (1) invitation to the Spirit to permeate the partnership; (2) recognition of interdependence within the body of Christ, and (3) intentionality toward aligning broader systems with the inverted value structure of God's kingdom. This type of kingdom-oriented collaboration points to the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus and gives a glimpse of the full and glorious transformation of all the created order that will be found in the new creation.

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PART I

FOUNDATIONS

INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND

In recent decades there has been growing consensus that addressing large-scale systemic issues requires organizations to go beyond loose connection to integration of their efforts with other like-minded organizations.¹ If connections between organizations are viewed on a spectrum from low to high levels of involvement, “collaboration” falls on the end of highest intensity, requiring increased levels of commitment, trust, and coordination.² The imagery of “weaving” is sometimes used to describe the process by which collaborations develop, as the experiences and strengths of multiple parties are woven together to create a stronger, more effective system.³

Despite significant discussion around collaboration in both professional and academic circles, gaps exist in the realm of Christian theology. While there has been scholarly discussion around the theology of collaboration, few resources address what this theology means specifically for *groups* of people seeking to collaborate.⁴ The reasons for organizations to collaborate are often clear: greater efficiency and better results. For Christian organizations and ministries, can faith and theology ground and guide the motivation to

collaborate? Is collaboration a pragmatic option for strategy planning, or a theological imperative for God's people? These questions provided the impetus for this project.⁵

THE THESIS

This paper's thesis is that collective collaboration is not merely pragmatic but deeply rooted in Scripture and fundamental to God's created order.⁶ While humanity's collaborative vocation was distorted by the Fall, it is transformed by Jesus, who restores humanity's broken relationship and invites believers to collaborate within a cruciform value system, in which organizations are willing to lose what they have for the sake of his kingdom. Ultimately, it will be suggested that distinctly Christian, cruciform collaboration among groups involves (1) invitation to the Spirit to permeate the partnership; (2) recognition of interdependence within the body of Christ, and (3) intentionality toward aligning broader systems with the inverted value structure of God's kingdom.

METHODOLOGY

This study is oriented by biblical theology, which assumes an overarching narrative running through the Old Testament and New Testament.⁷ Key moments in the biblical narrative are highlighted in order to draw attention to collective collaboration. Closest attention is given to two series of events: the early primeval period (Genesis 1–11) and the beginnings of the Church (Acts, the Pauline Epistles). These passages function as key anchors for describing the overarching vision for collaboration in the Bible: Genesis 1–11 illustrates how

collaboration was built into the structure of the universe at creation, and though the original framework was distorted, the beginnings of the Church speak to the renewal and development of this collaborative element through the life and work of Jesus Christ.⁸

Rather than focusing on discrete, disconnected examples of collective collaboration, this narrative approach better draws the Church, today, into God's story around collaboration. Klink and Lockett explain, "The single story told in the Bible actually renders a 'world'; it shapes a new reality within which readers are invited to find themselves."⁹ As this study traces the role of collaboration within the Bible's broader narrative, readers are invited to ask how their organizations can participate in the story that God is telling.

DEFINITIONS AND RELATED WORDS

COLLECTIVE COLLABORATION

The English word "collaboration" has been a buzzword in American churches of all types in the 21st century and is often used alongside synonyms like "coordination," "cooperation," and "partnership" without much distinction. Paul W. Mattessich and Kirsten M. Johnson suggest:

*"Collaborations bring previously separated organizations into a new structure with full commitment to a common mission. Such relationships require comprehensive planning and well-defined communication channels operating on many levels. Authority is determined by the collaborative structure. Risk is much greater because each member of the collaboration contributes its own resources and reputation. Resources are pooled or jointly secured, and the products are shared."*¹⁰

More briefly, and from a faith-based perspective, Kirk Franklin states, “collaboration means working intentionally and relationally.”¹¹ In comparison to partnership, he notes that collaboration “better conveys the idea of relationship-based cooperation than ‘partnership,’ a term that can carry transactional overtones.”¹² Franklin also draws attention to a distinction of collaboration within Christian mission: “shared calling under the Holy Spirit’s guidance.”¹³

Drawing on these definitions, this paper uses the term “collective collaboration” to describe *groups* of people involved in coordinated efforts that are intentional, relational, and integrative, in the sense of bringing two or more previously independent groups into a new, interdependent relationship centered on a common mission. It can refer to secular or Christian partnerships, in contrast to “cruciform collaboration” (see below).

CRUCIFORM COLLABORATION

Beyond “collective collaboration,” Christians are invited into “*cruciform* collaboration”: partnership with God, one another, and all of creation that is reshaped by the cross.¹⁴ “Cruciformity,” as defined by Michael Gorman, is “conformity to the crucified Christ...this conformity is a dynamic correspondence in daily life to the strange story of Christ crucified as the primary way of experiencing the love and grace of God.”¹⁵ He further explains, “Cruciform love and power are ways of being for others, expressions of commitment to the weak, to the larger body, and to enemies. Even cruciform hope requires a vision of a future much broader than the fate of the self alone.”¹⁶ This paper applies Gorman’s category to inter-organizational partnerships, contending that collective collaboration that is fully “Christian” must model this cruciform posture.

COLLABORATION IN BIBLICAL HEBREW AND KOINE GREEK

In *Collaborative Missional Leadership*, Franklin compiles a chart of the words (and principles) in Biblical Hebrew and Koine Greek that relate to collaboration.¹⁷ While a great reference, when the words are examined on their own they provide only a piece of the overall picture related to collaboration in the Bible. For this reason, words related to collaboration, such as *bērît* (“covenant”) and *koinōnia* (“partnership”) are addressed not in isolation but within the larger narrative related to collective collaboration in the OT and NT. These words are viewed as single files within a larger mosaic that comes into view when examining the broader emphasis on collaboration that weaves through the Bible.

PART II

THE MACRO-STORYLINE

Collaboration began in eternity past, in the perfect, shared partnership within the Trinity.¹⁸ In God's revelation of himself within Scripture, the early chapters of Genesis provide a foundation for building a theology of collective collaboration. Genesis 1 describes how humans were created as one part of a collaborative, interconnected system, in which each part of the universe operates in unity with one another. Genesis 2 describes humanity's original vocation as one of collaboration both with God and one another in the Garden. In the consequences of the Fall, Genesis 3 describes broken relationships with God, one another, and creation. The brokenness goes beyond individual relationships to describe an entire interconnected system that no longer operates as was intended. Genesis 4–11 presents the aftermath of the Fall, demonstrating that God-honoring collective collaboration will not come naturally to humans within a fallen world. A significant moment is found in Genesis 12, which describes the beginnings of God's redemptive plan to bless all the world and restore the relationships broken at the Fall. It is through restored relationships with God, one another, and the entire created order, that collective collaboration, in the way it was originally intended, becomes possible.

However, what Jesus inaugurated is not merely a renewal of the original created order but a *new creation*. The second part of the macro-storyline will describe the systems-level restoration accomplished by Christ, and the new creation that his life, death, and resurrection inaugurated. Each broken relationship—with God, with one another, and with all of creation—is

transformed by the Gospel, and woven back together. This provides the foundation for collaboration that not only reflects God's original design but operates within a new *cruciform* value system inaugurated by Jesus, in which the strong are weak, the rich are poor, the wise are shamed by the folly of the Gospel, and believers are called to lose what they have for the sake of others and the kingdom of God.¹⁹

THE MACRO-STORYLINE

TOWARDS CRUCIFORM COLLABORATION

The three relationships that carry humanity's collaborative vocation are ordered together at creation, thrown into disorder by the Fall, and renewed and transformed in Christ.

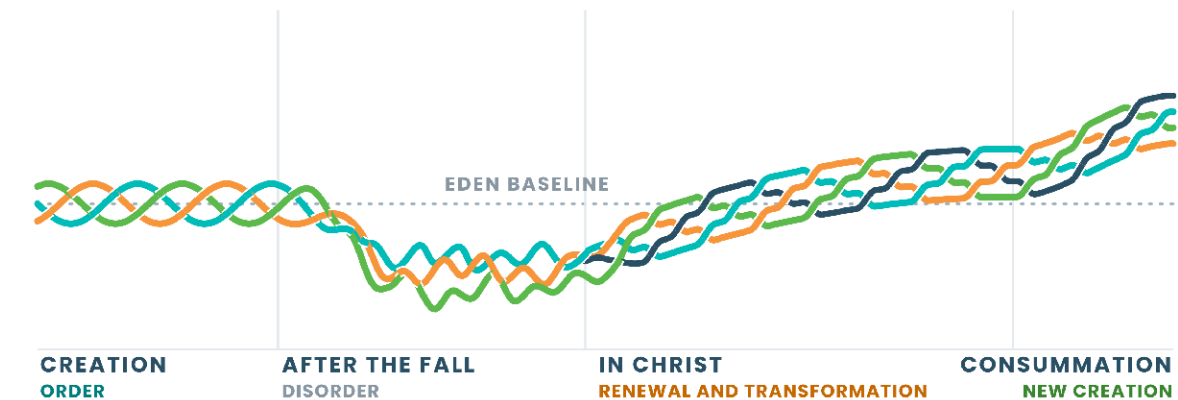


Figure A. The trajectory of the biblical narrative for each of the three relationships. What Christ inaugurates is not simply a restoration of the garden but a renewal of the order established by God at creation, now grounded in a transformational new value system that integrates diverse groups into the unity of his kingdom.

— God — One another — All of creation — All nations

Figure A traces and summarizes this “macro-storyline” related to collaboration, depicting how the order built into creation and disrupted by the Fall is later renewed and transformed through what Jesus accomplished. This development will be further drawn out in the following sections.

OLD TESTAMENT FOUNDATIONS

GENESIS 1

Genesis 1 depicts a universe in which each part—each element of the earth and the universe—functions in perfect coordination with each other. Creation began as a fully ordered, comprehensive, terrestrial and interstellar ecosystem. At six moments during God’s creative process there is a pause in the action, and God declares that the creation is “good” (*tôb*) (vv. 4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25), expressing that it is ordered and well-functioning. The elements of the creation account are “good” in that they operate in harmony with each other, like the cogs of an intricate clock (see Figure B).²⁰

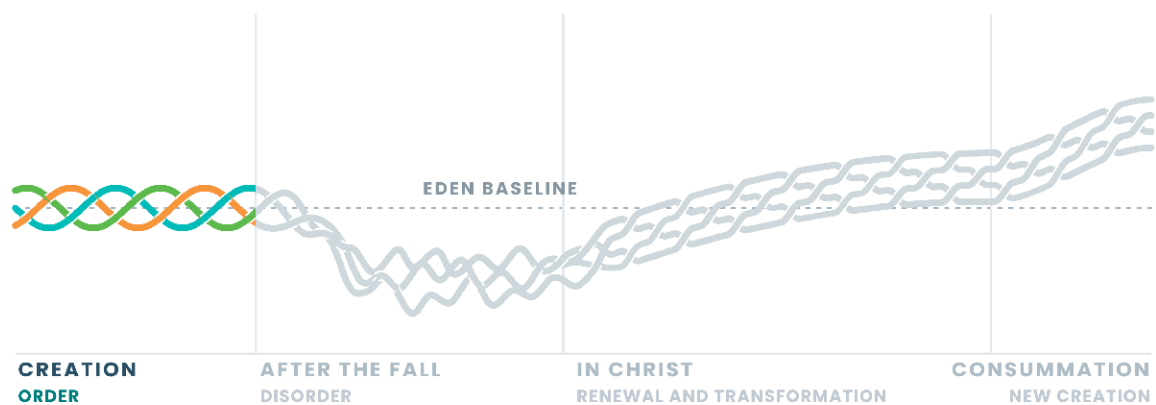


Figure B

Within this well-ordered system, God creates humanity in his “image” (Gen 1:26–27).²¹ Karl Barth suggested that the “image of God” described humanity’s unique ability to live in partnership with God.²² Claus Westermann picks up on this suggestion, stating that “the uniqueness of human beings consists in their being God’s counterparts...humans are created in such a way that their very existence is intended to be their relationship to God.”²³ As will be discussed in the next section, Genesis 2 also describes humanity’s intended vocation as partnership with God and one another.

The finale of the account in verse 31 emphasizes the coordination of each part of the created order, including humanity. Each element on its own was “good,” but now, taken as a fully functioning whole, God declares that it is “very good.”²⁴ Together, it was operating at a level far beyond what each individual part could contribute on its own. Functioning collaboratively, it was very good.

Within this context, God “rests.” In ancient Near Eastern thought, when a god “rested,” it had less to do with relaxation than with having “[achieved] equilibrium and stability.”²⁵ The establishment of his presence signals that the “ordering” of the complex ecosystem that makes up the universe had been completed. As further discussed in the next section, God chooses to *enter into* this beautifully ordered universe, to let his presence invade the physical space that humanity occupies, and to collaborate with humans in his continuing creative work.

GENESIS 2

Genesis 2:4b–5 introduces a new scene:

In the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens, when no plant of the field was yet in the earth and no vegetation of the field had yet sprung up—for the Lord God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was no one to till the ground.²⁶

These verses describe two lacks—things that would need to be addressed before plant life (i.e., food) could be cultivated from the ground. First, the Lord God will need to cause it to rain, and secondly, someone needs “to work the ground.” To address the second lack, God places a man into a garden for a specific reason: “to work it and keep it” (2:15).²⁷ God creates the garden, but partners with a human to develop and protect it, so that it brings forth new life through plants and food.²⁸

This partnership can be further seen in the creation of the animals—God creates the animals, but then the man is given the significant task of naming the animals (2:19–20). In the ancient Near East, the act of naming was a significant act, because the given name was seen as having real significance in shaping destiny.²⁹ Here, God invites the man to partner with him in his work of creating and “ordering” the animals.

The emphasis on collaboration is also shown in the introduction of the woman: “Then the LORD God said, ‘It is not good that the man should be alone: I will make him a helper as his partner’” (2:18). The phrase “not good” (*lō’-tôb*) does not refer to a moral failure but rather that something is not functioning at full capacity. There is a recognition that this individual human, acting on his own, could not fully fulfill his vocation.

The woman is described as an *ēzer* in Hebrew, a term frequently used in the Hebrew Bible to describe God, especially in his actions to protect Israel.³⁰ This term suggests that the woman was created to be a “defender”—she is meant to partner with the man in his work and his “keeping” of the garden.³¹ To fully accomplish the creative and defensive vocation given to humanity by God, collaboration was required.

The humans’ collaborative work happens in the presence of God. Life in the garden is presented as a unified, interdependent ecosystem guided and inhabited by God (he “walks” in the garden [3:8]). His presence steers humanity’s collaborative actions toward continued wholeness by providing directions and parameters for them to operate within (Gen 2:15–18; cf. Gen 1:28–30). As the next chapter shows, their rejection of these parameters and consequent loss of this life within God’s presence sets humanity on a path away from unity and interdependence toward divisiveness and self-promotion.

GENESIS 3–10

Before the Fall, the two humans worked side by side. Rather than individual agendas, they operated in the vocation given to them by God, coexisting in harmony with animals and the natural world. The humans lived in God's presence, not as passive recipients, but as active collaborators in his creative activity. All the individual pieces of the creation were ordered and operated in unity. In the language of Genesis 1, it was *very good*.

As a result of the choice to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, the humans are thrust into a new reality outside God's presence, characterized by disconnect and conflict between those who had worked in harmonious collaboration in the garden. The consequences of the Fall involve conflict between humans and the animal world (3:14–15); between human and human (3:16); and between humans and the nonhuman world (3:17–19).

Within this conflict, each human (or group of humans) begins to see themselves as the arbiter of what is “good” and “not good.” Removed from the Garden and God's orienting presence, there is a desire to protect one's own interests and structure circumstances to most benefit oneself. An extreme example of this trend toward self-interest can be found in Genesis 4:1–11, the story of Cain's murder of Abel.³² This first murder is the horrific antithesis of God's vision of collaboration—one human killing another, rather than living in shared participation in the creation mandate.

The relational repercussions of the Fall can be traced through the rest of the primeval history.³³ Outside of the presence of God in the garden, humanity's collaborative vocation remains largely forgotten. An upward trend of violence culminates before the Flood: “The Lord saw that the wickedness of humans was great in the earth and that every inclination of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil (*ra*) continually” (Gen 6:5). This world is now “filled with violence” (6:11), and humanity now consistently chooses to do “evil” (*ra*), that

which distorts and further damages the created order.³⁴ This is a far cry from the garden reality, when humans worked in cooperation to work and keep a “very good” created order so that there would be new life and flourishing.

God essentially “resets” creation through the Flood, throwing the world back into the original state of primordial chaotic waters. But the “new creation” soon repeats the pattern of the first, with conflict and divisions arising not long after the waters subside within Noah’s own family (Gen 9:18–27). Rather than operating collaboratively within the good order established by God at creation, the strands of the tapestry unravel (see Figure C): humans continue to find themselves alienated from God’s presence, at odds with one another, and struggling against the natural world.

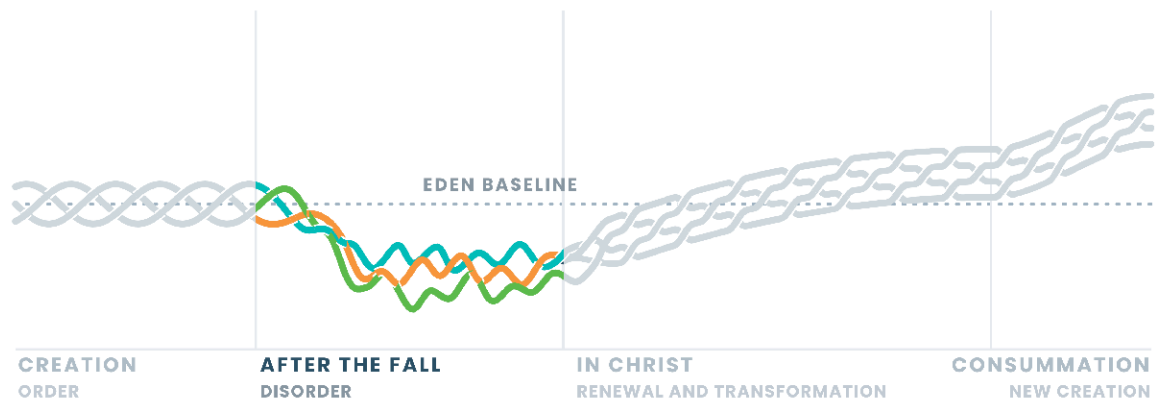


Figure C

GENESIS 11

While the Flood provides a new beginning and establishes clear boundaries when it comes to violence (Gen 9:5–6), it does not correct the consequences of the Fall, as can be seen in the story of the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11). As people traveled east, away from Eden, they settled in a plain and began to build “a city and a tower with its top in the heavens” (11:4).

The mention of the “heavens” is significant, because this was considered the realm of divine beings—entering them through one’s own power and volition was not humanity’s prerogative.³⁵ Humans were not created to be gods, and

their attempts so far to operate as though they were have resulted in disaster (Genesis 2–4, 6).³⁶ Coming on the heels of these other accounts, Genesis 11 addresses a similar theme: “human usurpation of divine roles.”³⁷ They attempt to reengineer the perfect, good system that God had established: now, humans attempt to ascend to God, rather than God descending to earth.

This theme is emphasized when humans initiate their project by co-opting God’s words, “*let us* make a name for ourselves” (Gen 11:4). Up until this point in Genesis, the 1st common plural cohortative (“let us”) has only been used by God in his act of creating humans (Gen 1:26; cf. Gen 3:22, “like one of us”). With one exception, in the entire Old Testament it is always God who says he will “make a name” for human(s) or himself.³⁸ Instead, at Babel the group looks inwardly to determine what they should do to make themselves famous, initiating this project “for themselves.”³⁹ Rather than living out the mandate to fill and steward the earth, contributing to the flourishing of the entire ecosystem (Gen 1:28–30), they choose to pool all their efforts and resources into a project that will benefit their group alone.⁴⁰ Interestingly, their fear of “scattering” (11:4) may hint at fears that God will take punitive action to force them into the vocation they were given within the created order.

Humans do coordinate and collaborate in Genesis 11, but they do it in opposition to God’s purposes for them. Rather, they collaborate for the self-preservation and self-aggrandizement of humanity, without reference to their role within the “very good” creation that God had established. God declares, “This is only the beginning of what they will do” (11:6). It is unlikely that God is personally threatened by what humanity might do—the concern is about the destructive potential on his good creation when humans collaborate outside of God’s purposes. When humans are given free rein to go after their own self-interest, collaboration can have devastating results. There are many examples from history and the present day of horrors unleashed

when groups are united toward a shared, selfish purpose. What the humans accomplished displays the power of unity in action, but it is an undesirable power.

Ironically, their attempt to avoid scattering and remain an insular, single group led to an obstacle that still impacts collective collaboration today: language barriers. As will be discussed further below, God would later build on what happened at Babel by bringing clarity and comprehension out of a multitude of languages at Pentecost. At the time, however, the confusion of languages could be read as a means of curbing humanity's misguided efforts, but it also provided the context for a higher level of collaboration than was present in Eden: namely, collaboration that involves diverse ethnic, cultural, and linguistic groups.⁴¹ This possibility of “transforming diversity into a resource” is at the heart of cruciform collaboration and is only made possible through what Jesus accomplished, as further discussed below.⁴²

GENESIS 12

The accounts in Genesis 1–11 describe a move from God-inspired collaboration between all aspects of the created order to conflict, fragmentation, and self-pursuit. A theology of collective collaboration must consider how groups of people can overcome these effects of the Fall and embrace true partnership oriented by God's presence, as humanity was designed to operate.

The next chapter shows a way that God chooses to address the relational fragmentation that resulted from the Fall. He begins by working through a single man: Abraham. Abraham (at this point, “Abram”) is told to leave his home and go to a land that God will show him (12:1). Previously God had forcibly moved people: the humans were expelled from Eden (Gen 3:23–24), Cain was “driven away” from the ground (Gen 4:14), and the humans were forcibly scattered from the tower of Babel (Gen 11:8). Here, Abraham is given the opportunity to make an intentional choice to leave and act within God's

framework. While in Genesis 11, the humans initiate their own plans, in Genesis 12, Abraham is led by God's initiative. God calls him to leave, and Abraham responds. Abraham does not attempt to make a name *for himself*, but God promises that he will do it for him.⁴³

Also in contrast to Genesis 11, the focus on making a name for Abraham is not insular—the intention was never for it to end with Abraham's "group" (his family). God says, "I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Gen 12:3). Abraham is blessed so *that* he will *be* a blessing.⁴⁴ As the consequences of the Fall spread from two humans, to their family, to "the whole earth" (Gen 6:11–12), similarly God will spread his blessing outward from a single man, Abraham, to his family, to the nation of Israel, to all the nations of the earth.⁴⁵

Later, God formalizes his partnership with Abraham through a covenant (*bērît*; see Genesis 15; 17). This style of agreement was utilized at key moments in Israel's history to describe God's relationship to his people.⁴⁶ Now removed from God's immediate presence in Eden, the covenants teach Israel and the world what God is like by following a format that was familiar in their context.⁴⁷ Rather than ascertaining what God wanted through complicated divination practices, as was common in contemporary ancient Near Eastern religions, God's covenants helped his people understand how to live in partnership with him.⁴⁸ The covenants gave a glimpse of what it could look like to live in a comprehensive peace (*shalom*) encompassing all levels of relationship: with God, with one another, and with all of creation.

FURTHER OLD TESTAMENT DEVELOPMENT

Looking beyond the covenant with Abraham, instances in the Old Testament can be found of groups collaborating successfully toward a purpose given to them by God. Instances of coordination among the twelve tribes (e.g. Josh 1:12–18; 22:1–9) and the collaboration involved in the building of the Temple (1

Kings 5:1–18) are two significant examples. The post-exilic cooperation led by Nehemiah to rebuild Jerusalem’s walls is another example. There is also an important thread throughout the OT that calls Israel to remember marginalized groups: “the poor, the widow, and the sojourner” (see, e.g. Ex 22:21–24; Deut 10:17–19; Lev 19:9–10, 33–34). These injunctions are a reminder to look beyond the priorities of individual family groups or tribes or even national identity, and consider the needs of other groups. They are small foreshadowings of new creation, where there will be unity and wholeness between all the components of the created order.

The OT looks forward to this new creation, a more comprehensive answer for how the individual elements of the created order (including individual people and groups of humans) can be reoriented and restored to their proper relationship with one another and God. As Israel repeatedly broke the covenant and eventually was sent into exile, prophets looked forward to a time when God would bring judgment on the wicked, establish his kingdom among his people, and bring the nations together under his rule, providing the foundation for unity and comprehensive peace.⁴⁹ This peace would go beyond Eden, uniting all the diverse language and ethnic groups that resulted from Babel. In the centuries leading up to Jesus’s birth, eschatological expectations grew. How would God establish this kingdom of peace—with his people living in his presence—unified under his rule?

TRANSFORMATION THROUGH JESUS

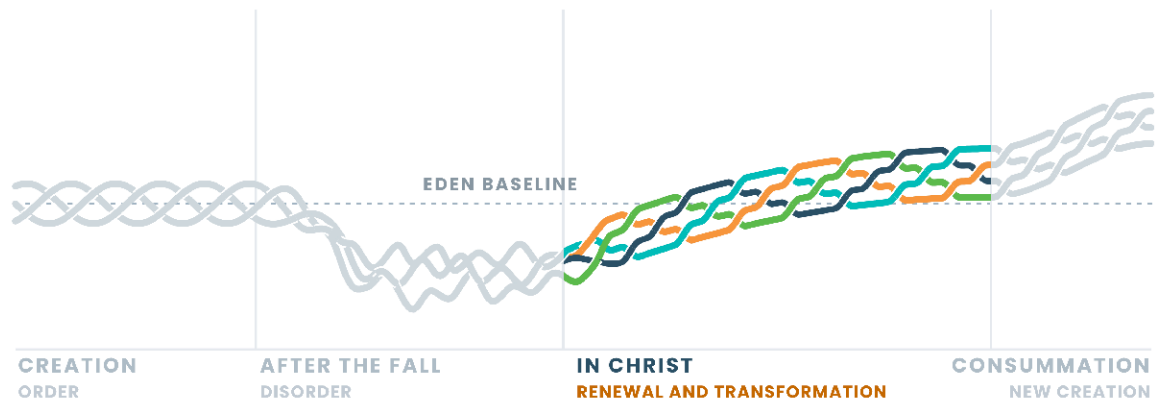


Figure D

Jesus announces the arrival of this kingdom of God: the long-awaited moment when God would act decisively and establish his rule among his people.⁵⁰ Rather than a military coup, as many expected, the coming of God's kingdom was modeled in Jesus through humility, self-sacrifice, and love of enemies. Christopher Watkin explains,

“Jesus unleashes and makes visible a power in the ethic of love that out-muscles the brute force of the Roman ethic of violence, quietly and imperceptibly dissolving the foundations of the Roman ethic in a way that would not have been apparent to anyone present at the crucifixion, but that in time decisively shifted the social imaginary of the cultures upon which Christianity was to leave its mark.”⁵¹

In other words, Jesus's power is displayed not through physical or political might, but through spiritual power found in this “ethic of love.” Seas are calmed, diseases are healed, and demons are cast out. Outcasts are reintegrated into the community. Miracles that display his power over the

natural world, demons, and diseases serve as signposts of God's desire to bring about the reconciliation of all things, a transformation that goes beyond the order and stability that was lost in the Fall.

This transformation involves a countercultural reversal of human power structures: the “poor in spirit,” the “meek,” the “mourners,” and the “persecuted” are called “blessed” in God's kingdom (Matt 5:1–10). In this new value system, a radical new form of collaboration, “cruciform collaboration,” becomes possible, as the relationships warped by the Fall are redeemed and realigned within this new value system. The sections below will look at each redeemed relationship in turn: with God, with one another, and with all of creation.

RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

Expectation and Fulfillment through Christ

After the destruction of the Temple (including the departure of God's presence [Ezek 10:18]) and the Babylonian exile, the Jewish people looked forward to a time when God would again establish his presence among them. There were expectations that this would go beyond him being present in a localized manner (as in the tabernacle and temple) and that God would live with his people in true communion as their king.⁵²

The birth of Jesus, “God with us,” represents the fulfillment of these expectations—God's physical presence is on earth with his people. God again walked in his creation, this time as a human. He modeled and taught how humans should work together as they listen to him, and then the Spirit, and are guided by his example. Followers of Jesus are now given the opportunity to live with God's presence within themselves.

Where the humans in the Garden failed to fully live out their roles as partners in God's creative work, Jesus is “the new Adam” (1 Cor 15:45; Rom 5:12–21), living the life that God intended for humanity, characterized by humility and self-sacrifice (Phil 2:1–11, see further below). Jesus also models intimate connection

(“oneness”) with the Father. In John 17:21, he prays “that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.” Unity is integral to the Church’s witness and, ultimately, to the fulfillment of the Great Commission. Jesus’s humility and oneness with the Father provide the model for the Church to follow in partnerships.

The Cross

The crucifixion stands at the heart of the kingdom’s reversal of conventional understandings of power and status.⁵³ Phil 2:6–11 describes this event that is so fundamental to the Christian faith: though Jesus was God himself, he “emptied himself,” submitting to crucifixion. Paradoxically, cruciform collaboration is grounded in an event that is the antithesis of collaboration: murder (cf. Gen 4:1–11), this time of the incarnate Son of God. That the Messiah, identified by Christians as the one who would receive “dominion and glory and kingship” (Dan 7:14), would instead suffer what Josephus described as “the most miserable [or pitiable] of deaths” was a shocking departure from expectation.⁵⁴ While the “terror of the cross” was widely recognized in the Roman world, for Jews there was an additional layer of horror, as the Torah stated that “anyone hung on a tree is under God’s curse” (Deut 21:23).⁵⁵ Gorman explains, “It was therefore an inherently absurd and offensive move on the part of early Christians, Paul included, to make a crucified political criminal and his cross...the focus of devotion and the paradigm for life in this world.”⁵⁶

The motive for Jesus to endure such shame and death was love (Jn 3:16). This love, revealed (1 Jn 4:9) and proved by Jesus’s sacrifice (Rom 5:8) confirms a new Kingdom ethic: love sums up the law and entails sacrifice. Christians are called to “walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God” (Eph 5:2). Paul applies this ethic to how Christians should relate to each other, not seeking their own interests, but the interests of others (Phil 2:3–4). This is the “mindset” of Christ (Phil 2:5). As an

example, do not eat food when a fellow believer struggles to eat food sacrificed to idols, a fellow believer “for whom Christ died” (1 Cor 8:11; cf. Rom 14:15). When collaboration is cruciform, it is shaped and accelerated through sacrificial love, rather than selfish interest or mere transactional gain. The “perfect harmony” between individuals and groups in the kingdom of God is not finding a secure “win-win” solution; but love that gives, sacrifices, and ultimately dies for the other (Col 3:14).

The language of receiving a name from God, in contrast to “making a name for oneself” at Babel, reappears in Philippians 2. Paradoxically, as a result of his shameful death, God exalted Jesus: “he *gave him the name* that is above every other name, so that at the name given to Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (vv. 9b–11). In contrast to the powerful conquerors who ruled the ancient world and made a name for themselves through military victories, Jesus’s power was displayed in weakness. Watkin notes, “In Christ’s historical moment as in ours, there is a weakness that requires greater show of strength than any show of force.”⁵⁷ Cruciform collaboration emulates Jesus’s counterintuitive posture—following him in his self-sacrifice of love and trusting that in weakness, there is strength (2 Cor 12:10).

Beyond Babel

Following Jesus’s ascension, Acts 2 describes what happens when the Holy Spirit falls on the group of early believers, an event that some interpreters have connected with the events in Genesis 11.⁵⁸ At Babel, humans operated “east of Eden,” outside the presence of God, pursuing a group agenda, but failing to accept their place within the order that God had established at creation. They come together to “make a name” for themselves. The result is scattering and division into different languages.

In contrast, at Pentecost, humans are dramatically reunited with God's presence, reorienting the believers' actions toward God's purposes. When the Spirit falls and the believers start speaking in tongues, it is not to show their own power or abilities. They speak "God's deeds of power" (Acts 2:11), unified not around "making a name" for themselves but around glorifying God's name. There is a shared focus on God's purposes and Jesus as Lord, rather than self-promotion.

Instead of confusion resulting from different languages, as at Babel, there is comprehension within the diversity of those present: "each one heard them speaking in the native language of each" (Acts 2:6). Each person could have miraculously comprehended in one single language, but God chose for the message to be shared in every language group that was present. At the same time, an emphasis on "togetherness" in the passage underscores a Spirit-empowered unity among all the languages being spoken.⁵⁹ Soal and Henry summarize: "we see that the unity or singularity that was there from creation, lost at the fall and scattered at Babel was then restored at Pentecost, in answer to Christ's prayers in John 17."⁶⁰ In other words, the events of Pentecost did not diminish diversity; they established the possibility of unity in the midst of diversity.

This is the reality that groups collaborating can now operate within: a restoration of humanity's original God-given collaborative vocation, but also a step into the new creation, in which all the nations in their diverse languages and cultures will walk by the light of God and receive healing in the New Jerusalem (Rev 21:24; 22:2). This cruciform collaboration requires an invitation for the Spirit of God to permeate the partnership and the diversity, as at Pentecost, providing the foundation for all action. The presence of God can then reorient humans toward God's purposes and provide unity among the diversity of those working together on God's mission.

RELATIONSHIP WITH ONE ANOTHER

The Gospel also results in redemption in the way humans relate to one another, empowered by the presence of God.

Partnership in Jesus (*koinōnia*)

Acts 2 speaks of one aspect of relationship within the early Church as *koinōnia*:

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship (koinōnia), to the breaking of bread and the prayers. Awe came upon everyone because many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need (vv. 42–45).

Koinōnia refers to partnership around something held in common.⁶¹ For the Church, what is held in common is Jesus himself—"you were called into the *koinōnia* of his Son" (1 Cor 1:9)—who is shared in common through the Spirit (Phil 2:1; 2 Cor 13:14). The person of Jesus becomes the defining marker of their relationship to one another, rather than former group boundary markers.⁶²

Central to Jesus's life was radical, self-giving love, and this is reflected in the early Church's *koinōnia*. Acts 2:42–45 describes how the early Church abandoned the sense of individual property and saw what was owned by one as owned by all. Paul says, "if one member [of the body] suffers, all suffer together with it" (1 Cor 12:26). The collection for Jerusalem, also described as a *koinōnia*, functions as a tangible expression of this ideology (see further discussion below). Since Jesus's countercultural message of forgiveness and sacrifice is at the center of what they hold in common in their *koinōnia*, their partnership is necessarily "cruciform": grounded in self-sacrificial love and care for one another.

Bridging of Differences

This *koinōnia* is a beautiful picture of the redemption of human relationships from the divisions and strife caused by the Fall. In their partnership in the Gospel, Paul repeatedly called individual believers to see themselves as one part of a larger whole. He depicts this “whole” through familiar images: the Church is a body (Rom 12:5; 1 Cor 12:18; Eph 2:15–16); a family (Eph 2:19),⁶³ a building (1 Cor 3:9–11, 16; Eph 2:20–21), a garden (1 Cor 3:5–9). In each of these examples, all the individual parts collaborate to form the whole, and each one vitally contributes to the functioning of the whole (see Figure E).

Paul writes of the value of each member:

There is no longer Jew or Greek; there is no longer slave or free; there is no longer male and female, for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to the promise (Gal 3:28–29).

Instead of factors like ethnic background defining who is in and who is out,⁶⁴ Paul demonstrates in Galatians that Jews and Gentiles are now joint heirs of Abraham, unified in their diversity by a common Man they worship. The historic chasms between these two groups are bridged. In v. 28, Paul goes beyond just the Jew

FIGURE E

- 1 Body** · Rom 12:5; 1 Cor 12:18; Eph 2:15–16
- 2 Family** · Eph 2:19
- 3 Building** · 1 Cor 3:9–11, 16; Eph 2:20–21
- 4 Garden** · 1 Cor 3:5–9



and Gentile distinction to include socioeconomic distinctions (“slave” and “free”), as well as “male” and “female.” All of these groups are one “in Christ,” bound together by their recognition of Jesus as Lord (cf. John 17:20–23; Eph 4:3–6).⁶⁵

In other words, through the equalizing power of what Christ accomplished, the relational conflicts inherited from the Fall are restored. Humans have the opportunity again to relate to one another as collaborators on God’s mission *within and through* their diversity, whether it be linguistic, ethnic, cultural, or otherwise. This is not simple, as humans innately are drawn to using boundary markers and groupings to distinguish themselves from one another and find safety in the company of those who are similar to them. But in choosing a life “in Christ,” Christians choose to reject the use of those differences as ultimate boundary markers; rather, they join a “cruciform” community “shaped by [Jesus’s] story.”⁶⁶ These communities “exclude allegiance to every other so-called lord or god, but include people of all stations in life who confess and live Jesus as Lord, thus challenging the values of the day by their existence.”⁶⁷

Christ followers are invited to pursue their collaborative vocation in pursuit of God’s purposes, with God among them again in the Spirit. The Fall brought hierarchy, distinction, and separation from one another—Jesus’s kingdom draws unique people and peoples—together for a cause beyond individual interests. Together, Christian organizations and groups are invited to partner in “God’s massive purpose to bring wholeness and redemption to the entire creation, especially people from every nation.”⁶⁸

RELATIONSHIP WITH ALL OF CREATION

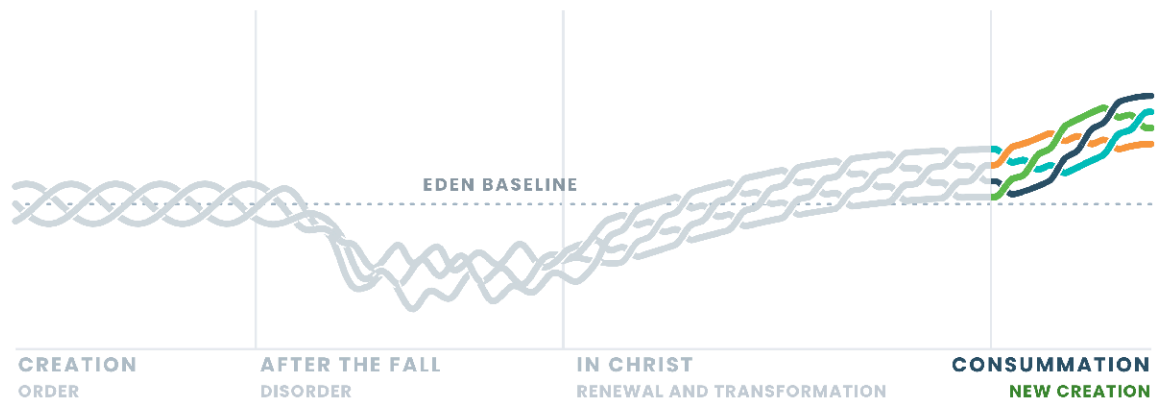


Figure F

Beyond restored relationships with God and one another, Jesus's redemption was all-encompassing and holistic—extending to all of creation—a transformation addressing all levels of the divisions that resulted from the Fall. The larger scope of what was accomplished through Christ is alluded to in Peter's reference to Joel 2:28–32 in Acts 2. This prophecy uses language of “the day of the Lord” (Acts 2:20), the highly anticipated eschatological moment when God would establish his kingdom on earth, pour out his Spirit, and set all things right. In this eschatological time, it was also expected that many nations of the earth would recognize the God of Israel as their king (see Isa 2:2–4; 60:1–22; Micah 4:1–3; Zech 9:20–23). Peter explains that God was fulfilling these expectations through Jesus's life, death, resurrection, and, now, through the pouring out of his Spirit (2:22–36). The fact that believers at Pentecost spoke in a multitude of languages from across the Mediterranean world prefigures the full culmination of these expectations—when nations will experience healing and walk by the light of God's glory in the New Jerusalem (Rev 21:24; 22:2).

This future hope involves not only reconciliation in the relationships between all nations, but also in the relationships between every element of the created order. Jesus's power over the natural world hints at this new creation reality: silencing a storm (Mark 4:35–41; Matt 8:23–27; Luke 8:22–25), walking on water

(Mark 6:45–52; Matt 14:22–33; John 6:16–21), turning water into wine (John 2:1–11), among many other examples. In Ephesians, Paul describes God’s ultimate plan for the universe: “he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth” (Eph 1:9–10). Similarly, N. T. Wright notes that Colossians 1:15–20 “focus[es] on the cross as the act whereby the good creation is brought back into harmony with the wise creator.”⁶⁹ Campbell summarizes: “The significance of Christ is not simply to unite humanity to God, but to bring the whole of creation into right relationship with him.”⁷⁰

In other words, the redemption already accomplished by Christ (but still being worked out in the world) functions on an ecosystem level. Instead of conflict and divisions between humans and the rest of the created order, God is “making *all* things new” (Rev 21:5).⁷¹ It is a system-level redesign, an establishment of lasting *šālôm* through the Prince of *Peace* (*šālôm*)—resulting in the elements of the universe functioning in proper order with respect to one another and living out the role established for them by God.⁷² In this harmony, rather than deification or exploitation of the natural world, humans rediscover their role as “caretakers” of creation.⁷³

Groups of people, and collaboration between groups of people, are part of this all-encompassing new creation. Restored relationships with God, with one another, and with all of the created order provide the foundation for collaboration that reflects God’s original designs for humanity and operates within a transformational, Christ-centered value system (see summary in Figure G). The following section will discuss two key collective collaborations in the NT that reflect cruciform collaboration: the Jerusalem Council and Paul’s collection for Jerusalem.

	 GOD	 ONE ANOTHER	 ALL OF CREATION
CREATION ORDER	Created to be in partnership with God Life in the presence of God Guided by God and oriented to his framework	Collaborative vocation with other humans One pair, one tongue, one place	Cooperation between all parts of the created order Declared “very good” (Gen 1:31)
AFTER THE FALL DISORDER	Lost access to the presence of God Guided by self-pursuit — “making a name” for ourselves	Conflict and division between humans Babel scatters humanity into many tongues	Conflict with the natural world Working the ground becomes a struggle
IN CHRIST RENEWAL AND TRANSFORMATION	<p>The incarnation: Jesus, God with us — the “new Adam” Guided by the Spirit and oriented to God’s framework</p> <p>↑ BEYOND EDEN Not God walking beside his people in a garden, but his Spirit indwelling them and going wherever they go (Acts 2).</p>	<p>Church — a collaborative “body” Outcasts reintegrated into community</p> <p>↑ BEYOND EDEN Pentecost redeems Babel’s diversity rather than erasing it: unity now holds across nations and tongues Eden never contained (Gal 3:28) — on a cruciform value system where the strong become weak.</p>	<p>The natural world answers to Jesus All things gathered up in him (Eph 1:9–10)</p> <p>↑ BEYOND EDEN Not the garden’s one plot to tend but a cosmic scope: all things in heaven and on earth united in him (Eph 1:10).</p>
CONSUMMATION NEW CREATION	God dwells with his people — his dwelling place is with them (Rev 21:3)	<p>A multitude no one could number, from every nation, tribe, people and tongue (Rev 7:9)</p> <p>The nations bring their glory into the city (Rev 21:26)</p>	<p>Creation made new, not repaired (Rev 21:5)</p> <p>Not a garden to keep but a city the nations walk into (Rev 21:24)</p>

Figure G. The three relational dimensions of human vocation across the biblical narrative. The *In Christ* row carries what is restored, and beneath it what the Kingdom adds beyond Eden; the *Consummation* row carries the new creation that completes it.

PART III

KEY NEW TESTAMENT EXAMPLES

THE JERUSALEM COUNCIL

The Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:1–29), humorously described by David Horrell as “the first ever Christian ‘conference,’”⁷⁴ represented a watershed moment in the development of the early Church. At this event, the leaders of the Church corporately decided that Gentile converts could remain uncircumcised, giving an official ruling to an issue that plagued Paul in his ministry to the Gentiles.⁷⁵ Throughout Israelite and Jewish history, circumcision had been a defining marker of belonging to the people of God, but the council’s collaborative decision-making process resulted in a dramatic shift.

The meeting was instigated when Paul and Barnabas found themselves in a disagreement over circumcision while ministering in Antioch (Acts 15:1–2). They are then sent, along with a group of other believers from Antioch, to bring the issue to the leaders in Jerusalem. “After much discussion” (15:7), they come to a Spirit-led resolution: circumcision will not be required, but Gentile converts should “abstain from food polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from the meat of strangled animals and from blood” (15:20).

The passage describes how the various parties involved show a willingness to communicate well and find consensus for the good of the entire body. Byun notes that the council “exhibited intensive inter-church communication and

cooperation for the unity of the church.”⁷⁶ Despite the variety of ethnic backgrounds and different cultural contexts, leadership was committed to coming to a shared path forward on this issue.⁷⁷

The council’s process was made possible by the restored relationships with God, one another, and creation, described in the previous section. First, and most significantly, their collaboration is clearly grounded in the presence of God in their midst. Acts 15 describes the Holy Spirit’s activity as the primary evidence cited in the debate. Peter points to the fact that the Gentile believers have received the Holy Spirit, just as Jewish believers had, marking their equal acceptance into the family of God (15:8–9). Barnabas and Paul point to miraculous evidence of the Spirit’s activity among the Gentile congregations (15:12). The Spirit then takes a front seat in making the decision: “It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to burden you with anything beyond the following requirements” (15:28).

This grounding in God’s presence paves the way for the various parties to operate as true partners in the Gospel. This narrative shows that this was not simple: it required intensive communication and honest airing of the various groups’ viewpoints (e.g. 15:5, 7, 12, 13, 22). But, as God’s presence provided the right environment for humanity’s original collaborative activity in the garden, here, the presence of God through the Holy Spirit guides the Jerusalem leadership (including sub-groups, such as the Pharisees [15:5]) and the Antioch delegates to a decision that brought down a barrier between these historically divided groups.

Beyond exemplifying redeemed relationships between groups, the Jerusalem Council also represented a large-scale systems-level change. The lack of agreement on how Gentiles should join God’s people presented a roadblock that could have severely stymied the Christian movement. Fortunately, the groups present at the Jerusalem Council recognized themselves as part of a larger ecosystem that needed to come into alignment with God’s purposes.

The willingness to do the hard work of coming to consensus, through a *cruciform* posture, resulted in a change that took down a significant barrier to joining the Church.

The Council's process points toward the new creation, when all things, including underlying systems that create barriers and conflicts, will not just be reset, but will be made new. Christian organizations and groups are invited to operate within this new creation paradigm—grounding collaboration in openness to the Spirit, honest communication with one another, and awareness of systems-level barriers affecting the advance of God's kingdom.

PAUL'S COLLECTION FOR JERUSALEM

Paul's collection for the Jerusalem church is another significant example of collective collaboration in the NT, as it involved multiple Gentile congregations collaboratively contributing toward the financial needs of the Jerusalem church.⁷⁸ It is mentioned frequently in Paul's letters (Rom 15:25–31; 1 Cor 16:1–4; 2 Cor 8–9) and required an enormous amount of his attention during his missionary years.⁷⁹ As noted above, Paul refers to this collection as a *koinōnia* (Rom 15:26; 2 Cor 8:4; 9:14), suggesting that he may have viewed the collection as a tangible expression of the intangible but very real partnership (*koinōnia*) in the Gospel that each individual church was a part of by means of their acknowledgment of Jesus as Lord.⁸⁰

As with the Jerusalem Council, this collective collaboration is grounded in the redeemed relationships inaugurated through Jesus. In terms of relationship with God, Paul calls the Corinthian church to look to Jesus and imitate his humility and self-sacrifice by sharing with the Jerusalem church:

I do not say this as a command, but I am, by mentioning the eagerness of others, testing the genuineness of your love. For you know the generous act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich (2 Cor 8:8–9).

Rather than following the individualistic approach that was characteristic since the Fall, which asks, “What’s in this for me?” or “How can I/we ‘make a name’ for ourselves?” Paul calls the Corinthians to cruciform collaboration—to embrace generosity by following Christ’s example of self-sacrifice for the good of others. The response of the Corinthian church would, indeed, test the ‘genuineness’ of their love. This principle is clear in Paul’s description of the Macedonian churches’ giving: “they gave themselves first to the Lord and, by the will of God, to us” (2 Cor 8:5). Giving themselves to God allowed them to fully give of themselves in their relationships with others.

With Christ’s example as the foundation, Paul then references Exodus 16 in order to describe what “equality” should look like in their relationship with one another (2 Cor 8:15). When the Israelites receive *manna* in the wilderness, some gather more and some gather less, but they all miraculously end up with the exact amount that they needed (Ex 16:17–18). When some attempt to hoard, the *manna* rots (Ex 16:20).

The Corinthians should model this pursuit of equality, relinquishing what they have stored up for the relief of those who currently have less and trusting that when they have needs in the future *manna* will be provided.⁸¹ Their spiritual and material oneness, inspired by the Spirit and guided by the example of Christ, should cause them to take notice of each part of the Body and care for one another (1 Cor 12:14–26), even risking their own potential loss. The implication is mutual interdependence—as the Corinthian church has benefited from the spiritual heritage of the Jerusalem church (see, e.g. Rom

15:27), the Corinthians are now invited to invest in the Jerusalem church financially. These roles are not necessarily fixed, but the resources should move towards the partner with less *manna*, as Paul implied in his exegesis of Exodus 16.

Looking more broadly, to the relationship with all of creation, the Jerusalem contribution points to the system-level changes inaugurated by Jesus. Though impoverished themselves, the Macedonians set aside their own need to see others receive *manna*—a true example of *cruciform* collaboration grounded in sacrificial love. The Macedonians' generosity, despite their own lack of financial resources, exemplifies a paradoxical new value system: those who had little to give, and yet gave anyway, are *the best* examples of generosity (2 Cor 8:1–5). Paul's endorsement of them reverses deeply ingrained power structures. Here, rather than money buying power, it is the Macedonians' generosity in the midst of poverty that raises their status. Both honor and resources move in the direction of the partner(s) with materially less.⁸²

Christian groups are called to be on the lookout for these systems of inequality when they collaborate. Where is there *manna* that has been distributed unequally? Where has *manna* been hoarded? When might an organization set aside its own pressing needs to see others receive *manna*? Where is there a need to acknowledge the reversed power structures of the kingdom of God and recognize an unlikely candidate as worthy of status?

PART IV

LIVING OUT CRUCIFORM COLLABORATION

Collective collaboration that is theologically grounded and shaped, defined here as *cruciform collaboration*, should model the redeemed relationships discussed above: with God, one another, and all of creation. It reflects God's original collaborative vocation for humanity and adopts the countercultural value system introduced by Jesus. In this system, believers are united in *koinōnia*: a collaborative, self-sacrificial posture that brings down divisive group boundary lines. Where groups were fractured along linguistic and ethnic lines at Babel, now groups are brought together with honor and value for their diversity through shared partnership in the person of Jesus. In their shared participation in the narrative of Jesus's life, death, and resurrection, groups such as networks, organizations, and even sectors are called to hold what they have loosely—being willing to lay it down when necessary for the sake of the other. This radical posture inverts typical motivations for collaboration: rather than collaborating because it benefits one's own organization, collaboration is seen as an opportunity to die to self for the sake of another. In this way, "in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ" (1 Pt 4:11). Three key elements of this cruciform collaboration are drawn out below.

THREE ELEMENTS OF CRUCIFORM COLLABORATION

**INVITATION TO THE SPIRIT***Relationship with God***INTERDEPENDENCE***Relationship with One Another***INTENTIONALITY***Relationship with All of Creation***INVITATION TO THE SPIRIT: RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD**

As the humans in the Garden performed their collaborative vocation in the presence of God, Christian organizations today must invite the Spirit's presence into their collaborations. The example of the Jerusalem Council shows how the Spirit played *the* central role in resolving a divisive issue and aligning the early Church with God's intentions. Their process exemplifies "wisdom that comes from heaven," through which they found peace and consensus (cf. Jas 3:17–18). When collective collaboration is guided instead by selfish ambition—a Babel-like attempt to "make a name" for oneself or one's own group—the result is ultimately disorder (Jas 3:16). Though wrong motivations may result in short-term success, as at Babel, they can result in long-term damage to the larger ecosystem (e.g. Gen 11).

Instead, the Spirit guides groups of believers in cruciformity—participation in the narrative of Jesus's life, death, and resurrection. Paul urged the Gentile churches to imitate Christ in his humility as they partnered in the collection for Jerusalem (2 Cor 8). In the same way that Jesus emptied himself and embraced humility (Phil 2:1–11), collaborators must be willing to enter

partnerships with a lose/win posture, asking what each organization is willing to “lose” on behalf of the others so that the kingdom of God “wins.” Bekele Shanko, Ethiopian mission leader, shares the following:

“In the work of the kingdom, all of us are insiders, owners, contributors, and servants. We are together in the glorious work of God; no one is an outsider. God is the owner and the King; we are privileged and favored to work in his kingdom. As we do so, we’re not competing with each other, because partnership in the kingdom of God is not a win-win, but a lose-win: we often “lose” so that Jesus wins. And when Jesus wins, all who belong to Him will win also.”⁸³

In reality, this could mean a loss for one’s own organization—sacrifice of finances, credit, resources, personnel—so that a partnering organization can succeed. Rather than looking to “make a name” for one’s own organization, Spirit-inspired cruciform collaboration looks for how God will be glorified and his kingdom expanded. In “losing to win,” organizations model the death and resurrection of their Savior and look forward to the renewal of all things.

INTERDEPENDENCE: RELATIONSHIP WITH ONE ANOTHER

In cruciform collaboration, the relationship between the two groups should be built on the acknowledgement that both groups are co-laborers with God and with one another, united by their *koinōnia* in Jesus. God chose to co-labor with humans in the garden and designed humans for partnership with one another (Genesis 2). Through the Spirit, believers are invited to take on this mantle again (cf. 2 Cor 6:1).⁸⁴

As co-laborers, believers are interdependent with one another. The man on his own was not sufficient to accomplish God's purposes in Eden, and organizations also need to be willing to acknowledge that no individual group is sufficient to accomplish God's purposes on their own. In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul uses the metaphor of the body to express that interdependence is not optional: "The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you'" (v. 21). While Paul speaks of individuals, the same principle can inform collective collaboration: no group will ever have all the knowledge, experience, or resources to achieve God's purposes in isolation. Where barriers exist—whether because of race, ethnicity, gender, religious background, socioeconomic position, or another factor—Christian organizations are called to recognize their identity as part of a community bound together by Jesus rather than any other group identity marker.

Importantly, the value of each member is based not on society's standards, but on the inverted power structure inaugurated by Jesus, in which the "weak" are strong, and the "poor" are rich. Leaders are encouraged to consider whether their organizations choose partners on the basis of their own estimation of value or on Jesus's countercultural value system.

The two NT examples cited above display this interdependence and mutual respect between diverse groups. In the Jerusalem Council, consensus required key leaders and groups with different perspectives to recognize the value of listening and discussing their multiple perspectives. For the Jerusalem collection, Paul called the Gentile congregations to support the Jerusalem church in their financial need, as the Jerusalem church had supported the Gentile churches in their spiritual development (e.g. Acts 11:19–26). They were bound together in dependence on one another, echoing the collaborative posture of humanity in the garden in Genesis 2 and finding unity in diversity. In both situations, recognition of their interdependence was vital for the groups to move forward in their collaborations.

INTENTIONALITY: RELATIONSHIP WITH ALL OF CREATION

Cruciform collaboration also requires intentionality. Collaborators must intentionally examine the systems they are a part of and consider the broader impact of their actions. Are they aligning these systems toward God's new creation? The Jerusalem Council is a good example of how intentionality is needed to address complex issues within collaboration. If each group had insisted on their viewpoint and had refused to engage in this formal discussion with one another, the Church might never have achieved a united front on this issue. The willingness of the assembly to participate in this event, discuss at length (Acts 15:6–7), and then to “be silent” to hear a counterargument (Acts 15:12), paved the way for a shared resolution.

The issues of economic inequality underlying the Jerusalem collection also speak to the need for intentionality. Paul called the Church to think about the broader issues of equality and power structures as they considered contributing to the collection. Groups collaborating should be aware of the overarching systems influencing both partners within the collaboration, as well as the wider environment, and intentionally work to find ways to “redistribute the *manna*” and establish greater equality. This might require, for example, honest discussion between organizations competing for resources or personnel. Groups should intentionally seek collaborations that move their sphere of influence toward the comprehensive peace (*šālôm*) of God's new creation.

NEXT STEPS

Beyond simply embracing this vision of cruciform collaboration—approaching collective collaboration through invitation, interdependence, and intentionality—what practical steps can organizations take to move forward? The steps provided in Figure H contain some suggestions for next steps. The purpose of this study is to offer a theological framework for thinking about collective collaboration, so these steps are merely a starting point rather than a toolkit for launching a collaborative project. For practical advice on collaboration in general, there are other excellent resources that address this topic, some of which are footnoted below.⁸⁵

NEXT STEPS

WHERE TO START



Pray

Consider areas in which your organization works in isolation. Pray for guidance—how could you work in collaboration in these areas?



Connect

Join a network. Attend collaborative events. Schedule one-on-one time with other organizational leaders to learn about their ministries. Brainstorm. Learn from others about how they collaborate.



Take action

Don't stop at connecting. Use existing resources to take next steps.



Spread the word

Cast the vision. Collaboration is built into the way God designed humans. Fulfilling the Great Commission requires us to acknowledge this and work together.

Figure H. A starting point rather than a toolkit.

LOOKING FORWARD IN HOPE

As we look forward in hope to the full consummation of God's kingdom in the new earth, we pray that this study provides a helpful starting point for thinking about collaboration as a significant element within Scripture's story. In *cruciform collaboration*, we recognize our organizations and groups as a small part of God's larger kingdom, an integrated, interdependent ecosystem that inverts the power structures of our world. Our calling is to live out the collaborative vocation imparted to humanity at creation and embrace the *koinōnia* we have with one another in the person of Jesus. May our cruciform collaborations point to the life, death, resurrection, and ongoing ministry of the Lord Jesus, and give a glimpse of the full transformation of all the created order that will be found in the new creation.⁸⁶

NOTES

1. Paul W. Mattessich and Kirsten M. Johnson, *Collaboration: What Makes It Work*, 3rd ed. (Fieldstone Alliance, 2018), 1. They note, “our world becomes more complex and interdependent each day. Globalization has become a reality. Communities are more diverse. Changes in the ways communities must do and solve problems, coupled with changes in information technology, frequently make collaboration the most effective tool for ‘bringing together a wide range of talents and resources to solve a problem, build a program, or create something entirely new’” (*ibid.*, citing Betsy Wilson, “The Lone Ranger Is Dead: Success Today Demands Collaboration,” *College & Research Libraries News* 61, no. 8 [September 2000]: 699). Other key works include Norman Walzer and Liz Weaver, eds., *Using Collective Impact to Bring Community Change*, Community Development Research and Practice Series (Boca Raton, FL: Routledge, 2019); Steve Waddell, *Global Action Networks: Creating Our Future Together* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); Phill Butler, *Well Connected: Releasing Power, Restoring Hope through Kingdom Partnerships* (Waynesboro, GA: Authentic Media, 2006).
2. Brian O’Connell describes “The Partnering Continuum” as a development from “connecting” to “cooperating” to “coordinating” to “collaborating” (REACT Services, accessed August 28, 2026, <https://reactservices.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Continuum-Presentation-2010.pdf>).
3. Some organizations even appoint “network weavers” who are skilled at connecting the right organizations and people to create greater density and depth of relationships, leading to great impact. Roles that emphasize collaboration and partnership, such as a Chief Collaboration Officer, are increasingly encouraged (Morten T. Hansen and Scott Tapp, “Who Should Be Your Chief Collaboration Officer?,” *Harvard Business Review*, October 11, 2010, <https://hbr.org/2010/10/who-should-be-your-chief-colla>).
4. For example, Trevor J. Burke addresses collaboration in the ministry of Paul but primarily in the context of his relationship with individual leaders (*Paul and His Colleagues: Identity, Collaboration, and Community* [London: T&T Clark, 2021]). Kirk J. Franklin mentions collaborations within the case studies of *Collaborative Missional Leadership: The Art of Working Together in God’s Mission* but does not specifically draw out the implications of his theology for groups (Oxford: Regnum Books International, 2025). Chris Bruno and Matt Dirks’ *Churches Partnering Together: Biblical Strategies for Fellowship, Evangelism, and Compassion* provides a practical guide for forming partnerships rather than a developed theology of collaboration (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014). An exception is Paul H. Byun, who addresses collaboration in Paul’s ministry and touches specifically on collaboration between the networks of churches that Paul planted (*Partnership in Ministry: A Study of Networking and Collaboration in Paul’s Ministry and Their Implications* [Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2023]). Stephen K. Pickard helpfully draws out the trinitarian theology behind collaboration but primarily applies it to collaboration between various ministries within the church rather than between distinct organizations or groups (*Theological Foundations for Collaborative Ministry*,

Explorations in Practical, Pastoral and Empirical Theology [Farnham, England: Ashgate, 2009]).

5. This paper itself is the result of a collaborative effort involving Global Alliance for Church Multiplication (GACX), 24:14, the International Council for Evangelical Theological Education (ICETE), and Asbury Seminary's Center for Church Multiplication. A study group began meeting for a few months in 2025–2026 to study and discuss Scripture related to this topic. This group was composed of Valerie Hamilton (GACX), Michael Ortiz (ICETE), Tsega Tilahun (24:14), and Bruce Wilson (Asbury Theological Seminary). The paper itself came out of those discussions, alongside additional research, and was primarily written by Valerie Hamilton, with Tsega Tilahun heavily involved in idea generation and drafting. Michael Ortiz and Bruce Wilson served as advisors and editors. Further editing and review was conducted by Kenneth Hamilton and Joey Shaw.
6. See definition of “collective collaboration” below. “Created order” is used to describe *all* of the created universe.
7. Hereafter, “OT” and “NT.” The term biblical theology is used broadly in biblical studies, often without much precision. D. A. Carson famously quipped, “Everyone does what is right in their own eyes, and calls it biblical theology” (“Systematic Theology and Biblical Theology,” in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000], 90–104). Edward W. Klink III and Darian Lockett wrote an excellent summary of the various approaches that fall under this term (*Understanding Biblical Theology: A Comparison of Theory and Practice* [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012]). The paper's approach most closely aligns with Klink and Lockett's Biblical Theology Type 3, which they describe as “Biblical Theology as Worldview-Story” (*ibid.*, 93ff.).
- Key representatives of this approach are John Goldingay, Richard Hays, and N. T. Wright. See, e.g. John Goldingay, “Old Testament Theology and the Canon,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 59, no. 1 (2008): 1–26.
8. It is not assumed that the biblical writers presented “collaboration” as a discrete theological concept. Rather, this study traces themes in the Bible that illuminate the nature and practice of collaboration as previously defined (namely, as partnership that requires increased levels of commitment, trust, and coordination).
9. *Understanding Biblical Theology*, 107.
10. Mattessich and Johnson, *Collaboration*, Appendix A, 79.
11. Kirk J. Franklin, *Collaborative Missional Leadership: The Art of Working Together in God's Mission*, Regnum Studies in Mission (Oxford: Regnum Books, 2025), 3.
12. *Ibid.*
13. *Ibid.* He notes further, “theologically, collaboration in mission aligns with the triune God's nature and purpose ... From a practical standpoint, building Spirit-led partnerships requires understanding differences, managing conflict, and nurturing a space where decisions are shared and resources flow freely” (*ibid.*, 4).
14. This paper approaches exegesis from a primarily literary perspective (see, e.g. Leland Ryken, *How to Read the Bible as Literature* [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984]) and works with the final form of the text within its present canonical context. Issues of textual and literary history will not be addressed. Attention will be given to historical backgrounds, either through the author's own analysis or through major commentaries. The statement of faith of the Global Alliance for Church Multiplication is assumed throughout (Global Alliance for

- Church Multiplication, "Statement of Faith," accessed September 9, 2026, <https://gacx.io/about/posture>.
15. Michael J. Gorman, *Cruciformity: Paul's Narrative Spirituality of the Cross*, 20th anniversary ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2021), 4–5.
 16. *Ibid.*, 350.
 17. Franklin, *Collaborative Missional Leadership*, 11, 14, 27–28.
 18. As J. I. Packer makes clear in *Concise Theology: A Guide to Historic Christian Beliefs*: "The three personal 'subsistences'...are coequal and coeternal centers of self-awareness...the one God ('he') is also, and equally, 'they,' and 'they' are always together and always cooperating, with the Father initiating, the Son complying, and the Spirit executing the will of both, which is his will also" ([Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale Elevate, 2011], 42). This implies that God himself is fundamentally collaborative. See also Miroslav Volf, who argues that though humans are ontologically distinct from God, they can "copy" God's trinitarian aspects in "some respects," including in the capacity of self-giving, which he refers to more precisely as "self-donation" (Miroslav Volf, "The Trinity Is Our Social Program": The Doctrine of the Trinity and the Shape of Social Engagement," *Modern Theology* 14, no. 3 [1998]: 405, 412–17).
 19. Bryant Myers also includes our broken relationship with ourselves (*Walking with the Poor: Principles and Practices of Transformational Development*, rev. and expanded ed. [Orbis Books, 2011], 64–65).
 20. Rather than conveying moral "good" (see, e.g. John H. Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament: Introducing the Conceptual World of the Hebrew Bible*, 2nd ed. [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2018], 187).
 21. This paper cannot fully survey all the options for how to understand the *imago dei*. For a helpful introduction to the history of interpretation on this complex topic, see Daniel Simango, "The Imago Dei (Gen 1:26–27): A History of Interpretation from Philo to the Present," *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 42, no. 1 (2016): 172–90.
 22. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics III/1: The Doctrine of Creation*, ed. G.W. Bromiley and T.F. Torrance, trans. J.W. Edwards, O. Bussey, and Harold Knight (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1958), 182–83.
 23. Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1–11: A Commentary*, trans. John J. Scullion (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1984), 158.
 24. The full force of God's statement is somewhat lost in English, because the Hebrew word (*hinnēh*), translated here as "indeed" (elsewhere, "behold") has no real equivalent in English. In this context *hinnēh* is likely used to draw strong emphasis to what follows it, which are the words "very good" (*ṭōb mē'ōd*).
 25. Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought*, 197. Genesis 1–2 contains multiple allusions to the future Temple (*ibid.*, 198). In the ancient Near East, temples were seen as a microcosm of the universe as a whole, so in Genesis 1, "[God] inhabiting his resting place is the equivalent of being enthroned—it is connected to taking up his role as sovereign ruler of the cosmos" (*ibid.*, 196–97).
 26. All English translations of Scripture are from the New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition.
 27. While "working" the ground refers to gardening or farming activities, the word translated "keep" in English is very often used in the Hebrew Bible in the sense of guard or protect.

28. This stands in stark contrast to other ancient Near Eastern cosmological accounts where humans are created essentially as slaves who do manual labor for the gods and ensure that their temples are maintained. e.g. in the narratives Atra-ḫasīs and Enūma eliš. See W. G. Lambert and A. R. Millard, *Atra-ḫasīs: The Babylonian Story of the Flood* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1969; repr. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1999), and W. G. Lambert, *Babylonian Creation Myths*, Mesopotamian Civilizations 16 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2013), 45–134 [Enūma eliš tablets I–VII].
29. Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought*, 188.
30. It is often used in contexts that employ military language and imagery (e.g. Ex 18:4; Deut 33:7; Psa 20:2; 89:19; 124:8; Isa 30:5; Ezek 12:14).
31. The word “to keep” (*šāmar*), part of the man’s vocation (Gen 2:15), also has a defensive, protective nuance to it.
32. Ironically, by vocation Cain is a “worker of the ground” (a farmer), one who should be producing and stewarding new life. Instead, he takes life, denying that he is his brother’s “keeper” (Hebrew *šāmar*).
33. Shortly after the account of Cain and Abel, the description of Cain’s descendant, Lamech, who sings “about himself and his dominance over individuals” (Nachman Levine, “Lemekh’s Song: Narrative Context and the Poetry of Violence,” *Milín Havivin* 2 [2006]: 141).
34. Similar to “good” (*tôb*), the Hebrew word translated “evil” (*raʿ*) can refer to that which is morally wrong but more often refers to what is “not beneficial.” If “good” describes a perfectly ordered system where each part works in unity, “evil” is what moves the parts out of alignment. “Evil” affects not merely an individual part, but the entire system, which can no longer function as it was intended.
- This clarifies why God brings the flood—the system had been corrupted, and a fresh start was needed.
35. Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought*, 168.
36. In Genesis 3, the woman eats the fruit because the serpent tells her it will make her “like God, knowing good and evil” (3:5). In Genesis 4, Cain and Lamech set themselves up as judges who can determine who deserves to live and die. In Genesis 6:1–4, humans apparently enter inappropriate relationships with angels.
37. The significance of preserving the ontological differences between mortals and the gods appears repeatedly in ancient Near Eastern stories (e.g. the tales of Gilgamesh and Adapa). See discussion in Tryggve N. D. Mettinger, *The Eden Narrative: A Literary and Religio-Historical Study of Genesis 2–3* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2007), 99–122, and David M. Carr, *The Formation of Genesis 1–11: Biblical and Other Precursors* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 52. See further discussion of these ideas regarding the Tower of Babel narrative in David M. Carr, *Genesis 1–11*, IECOT (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2021), 320.
38. David L. Petersen, *Genesis: A Commentary*, OTL (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2025), 106. David is the one exception (2 Sam 8:13), but “this claim appears immediately after the narrator has chronicled some of David’s wars and his dedication of certain valuable objects to the deity.” In the ancient Near East, making a name for oneself meant achieving “contemporary and posthumous fame” (Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, 548).
39. Note the repeated pronominal suffixes, “let us” and “for ourselves” (Gen 11:3, 4).
40. The humans’ motivation for this project is that they are afraid they will be “scattered.” “Scattering” (*pûš*) in the OT typically describes a negative consequence: it is mentioned, for example, as one of the

- consequences for breaking the covenant (Deut 4:27; 28:64; reversal of this in Deut 30:3). It is also an action taken against enemies: Num 10:35; 1 Sam 11:11; 2 Sam 22:15.
41. As Pope Leo XIV recently wrote: “from the plurality of voices and vision which, even though they sometimes remind us of the confusion caused by the diversity of spoken languages, a bright possibility emerges. Indeed, this is the possibility of building together, of transforming diversity into a resource and of making listening and dialogue the common ground upon which to cultivate justice and fraternity” (*Magnifica humanitas: On Safeguarding the Human Person in the Time of Artificial Intelligence*, encyclical letter, Vatican website, May 15, 2026, §7, <https://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiv/en/encyclicals/documents/20260515-Magnifica-humanitas.html>).
 42. *Ibid.*
 43. This contrast is apparent within the Hebrew grammar. In Gen 11:4, the humans use a type of imperative (first person cohortative, “let us”) followed by a preposition with suffix (“for ourselves”) to describe their intentions. In Genesis 12, the same grammatical structure is used when God commands Abraham to leave his country (imperative + preposition + suffix).
 44. A. D. Soal and D. Henry, “So the Last Will Be First: The Reversal of Babel (Gn 11:1–9) in Acts 2:1–13,” *Verbum et Ecclesia* 39:1 (2018): 2; John Goldingay, *Genesis*, BCOTP (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2020), 208; Petersen, *Genesis*, 116–17.
 45. According to N. T. Wright, “the whole point of the narrative, is that God has called Abraham and his family to undo the sin of Adam, even though Abraham and his family are themselves part of the problem as well as the bearers of the solution” (“Creation and Covenant,” in *Paul: In Fresh Perspective* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005], 21–39).
 46. Mosaic Covenant in Exodus 19–24 & Deuteronomy 29–30; Davidic Covenant in 2 Samuel 7 and 1 Chronicles 17; the New Covenant in Jeremiah 31:31–34.
 47. See discussion in Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought*, 287–302.
 48. See Daniel I. Block, “The Grace of Torah: The Mosaic Prescription for Life (Deut 4:1–8; 6:20–25),” *BSac* 162, no. 645 (2005): 3–22.
 49. Zechariah 14 most fully brings together these threads. See also Daniel 7; Obadiah; Isaiah 24, 52; Ezekiel 37 for other descriptions of God’s activity in this eschatological time.
 50. Jesus’s resurrection was the confirmation that God’s new creation had been inaugurated (see N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, COQG 3 [London: SPCK, 2003] 568).
 51. *Biblical Critical Theory: How the Bible’s Unfolding Story Makes Sense of Modern Life and Culture* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2022), 405.
 52. E.g. Zech 14:9, Obad 21, Isa 24:23, Isa 52:7, Dan 7:13–14, 27. This expectation persisted during the Second Temple period (see, e.g. Jub 1:17, 26–29; Tob 13:10–11; 14:5–7; 1 En 90:28–29; Pss. Sol. 17:21–46).
 53. This paper will not address the various theories on the mechanics of the atonement. Rather, this section discusses Jesus’s crucifixion as paradigmatic for the new value system that he inaugurated.
 54. Josephus, *Jewish War* (*Bellum judaicum*) 7.203, noted in Gorman, *Cruciformity*, 5.
 55. Cicero, *In Defense of Rabrius* (*Pro Rabi*) 5.16, noted in Gorman, *Cruciformity*, 5.
 56. *Cruciformity*, 5.
 57. *Biblical Critical Theory*, ch. 18.
 58. This connection was noted at least as early as Gregory of Nazianzus (4th cen) and is also mentioned by St. Augustine (4th/5th

- cen). See Gregory of Nazianzus, Or. 41.15–16, in *Discours* 38–41, ed. Claudio Moreschini, trans. Paul Gallay, SC 358 (Paris: Cerf, 1990); Augustine, Serm. 271, in *Sermons (230–272B) on the Liturgical Seasons*, trans. Edmund Hill, ed. John E. Rotelle, WSA III/7 (New Rochelle, NY: New City Press, 1993).
59. The concept of “togetherness” forms an *inclusio* around this passage. The chapter begins by describing how the believers were “all together in one place” (v. 1). This is reemphasized toward the end of the chapter: “All who believed were together and had all things in common” (v. 44).
 60. Soal and Henry, “The Reversal of Babel,” 2.
 61. Walter Bauer, *A Greek–English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed., rev. and ed. Frederick William Danker (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), s.v. “κοινωνία.”
 62. There are also important occurrences of *koinōnia* in which it describes a gift or contribution (see further discussion below).
 63. Also note the many addresses to “brothers and sisters” (*adelphoi*) throughout the NT (e.g. Rom 1:13; 1 Cor 1:10; Gal 1:2).
 64. In this setting, circumcision and food laws were significant factors.
 65. In reference to Eph 4:3–6, Constantine Campbell states, “Believers are to strive for the unity of the Spirit because they are, in fact, already one. They share in the one body, the one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God and Father of all” (*The Letter to the Ephesians*, Pillar New Testament Commentary [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2023], “Introduction”).
 66. Gorman, *Cruciformity*, 350.
 67. *Ibid.*, 366.
 68. Dean Flemming, *Foretaste of the Future: Reading Revelation in Light of God’s Mission* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2022), 7.
 69. *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church* (New York: HarperOne, 2008), 97. See also Rom 8:19–22.
 70. *The Letter to the Ephesians*, “Commentary, II”.
 71. In his discussion of 1 Corinthians 15, Wright summarizes, “that which we are tempted to regard as the permanent state of the cosmos—entropy, threatening chaos, and dissolution—will be transformed by the Messiah acting as the agent of the creator God” (*Surprised by Hope*, 99).
 72. Ultimately, “God intends in the end to fill all creation with his own presence and love” (*ibid.*, 102).
 73. See discussion in John Stott, *The Radical Disciple: Some Neglected Aspects of Our Calling* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2010), ch. 4, and Richard Bauckham, *The Bible and Ecology: Rediscovering the Community of Creation*, Sarum Theological Lectures (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2010), “Introduction.”
 74. David Horrell, “Paul’s Collection: Resources for a Materialist Theology,” *Epworth Review* 22, no. 2 (1995): 74.
 75. Scholars are divided as to whether Galatians 2:1–10 also describes Paul’s visit for the Jerusalem Council or a different visit (Craig S. Keener, *Galatians: A Commentary* [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2019], 108).
 76. Byun, *Partnership in Ministry*, 160.
 77. Jeffrey Kloha, “The Trans–Congregational Church in the New Testament,” *Concordia Journal* 34 (2008): 176.
 78. Note that scholars consider this separate from the collection given from Antioch to Jerusalem in Acts 11:27–30 (David J. Downs, *The Offering of the Gentiles: Paul’s Collection for Jerusalem in Its Chronological, Cultural,*

and Cultic Contexts [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008], 37–9). Whether Gal 2:10 relates to the Acts 11 collection or the multi-year collection is disputed among scholars—this debate is not taken up here, as it does not affect the argument of this paper.

79. See Byun, *Partnership in Ministry*, 104. Scholars have understood the primary significance of this collection in various ways. Some have suggested that the collection was part of a formal agreement between the leadership in Jerusalem and Paul, established when they gave him “the right hand of *koinōnia*” (Gal 2:9) (Andrew T. Lincoln, “Communion: Some Pauline Foundations,” *Ecclesiology* 5 (2009): 144; see also Stephan Joubert, *Paul as Benefactor: Reciprocity, Strategy and Theological Reflection in Paul’s Collection* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000). See Byun for a list of various interpretive options (*Partnership in Ministry*, 104–8).
80. Downs, *The Offering of the Gentiles*, 17.
81. Ralph P. Martin notes that this also “has to be understood in the light of Paul’s expectation, in Rom 11:12, 15, concerning the restoration of Israel and the promise of life from the dead by which Gentiles will benefit” (*2 Corinthians*, 2nd ed., Word Biblical Commentary 40 [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014], 435).
82. Julien M. Ogereau argues, “[Paul’s] intentions seem to have extended beyond the mere alleviation of poverty by means of charitable giving. Indeed, he appears to have aimed at reforming the structural inequalities of Graeco Roman society that were also becoming apparent in the early church (cf. 1 Cor 11:17–22), by fostering socio-economic *ισότης* between Jews and Gentiles and by establishing a global, socially and ethnically inclusive *κοινωνία* among them. Needless to say, this deeply challenged ancient socio-political theories and dissolved ancient prejudices based on socio-ethnic distinctions” (“The Jerusalem Collection as *Κοινωνία*: Paul’s Global Politics of Socio-Economic Equality and Solidarity,” *New Testament Studies* 58, no. 3 [2012]: 360–78). See also Joubert, who argues that Paul operated within existing Greco-Roman benefaction customs but reinterpreted them (*Paul as Benefactor*, 217–18).
83. Bekele Shanko, *Never Alone: From Ethiopian Villager to Global Leader* (Orlando, FL: Global Church Movements, 2021), 52.
84. Possibly also 1 Cor 3:9, depending on one’s reading of the genitive (as either objective or possessive). Note also Jesus sending his disciples out ahead—choosing to partner with them in his work (Luke 10:1).
85. See e.g. Franklin, *Collaborative Missional Leadership*, ch. 10; Mattessich and Johnson, *Collaboration: What Makes It Work*; Rick Warren, “How We Will Collaborate for the Great Commission,” white paper, Finishing the Task, n.d., accessed September 5, 2026, <https://finishingthetask.com/wp-content/uploads/White-Paper-Collaborate.pdf>; The Partnering Initiative, “12 Steps toward Successful Cross-Sector Partnerships,” n.d., accessed September 5, 2026, https://archive.thepartneringinitiative.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/12-steps_handout.pdf.
86. The written portion of this paper meets Level 4 standards set by VerifiedHuman in its use of generative AI for non-writing tasks only. All figures and the content therein are AI generated based on the human-written text. For more information, see <https://www.verifiedhuman.info/definitions-for-writers>.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR TEAM

Valerie Hamilton**LEAD AUTHOR**

Valerie Hamilton serves as the Director of Member Engagement for GACX, a global alliance for church multiplication, where she supports member organizations as they connect, collaborate, and learn from one another. She leads initiatives related to theological education, the academic study of collective collaboration, and alliance reporting. Her background includes eight years of teaching in Southeast Asia and Europe, most recently at the European Theological Seminary, and she holds a PhD in Old Testament from the University of Heidelberg.

Tsega W. Tilahun**CO-AUTHOR**

Tsega W. Tilahun is the Africa Implementation Coordinator for the 24:14 Coalition, bringing extensive experience in disciple-making and church multiplication movements to the study and practice of collaboration. Her work is rooted in the realities of movement leadership and in the development of relational and collaborative approaches to mission. She is currently studying under Dr. Michael Cooper through Ephesiology, where her research further explores the dynamics of movements and mission.

Bruce Wilson**ADVISOR AND EDITOR**

Bruce Wilson is Director of the Center for Church Multiplication at Asbury Theological Seminary. He has more than three decades of international experience as a pastor, consultant, and organizational leader, including more than ten years of ministry in Indonesia and leadership roles with College Church, ECHO, Global Switchboard, and GACX. His work focuses on church multiplication, organizational leadership, and the development of networks that strengthen participation in God's mission. He holds a Doctor of Ministry in organizational leadership from Asbury Theological Seminary.

Michael A. Ortiz**ADVISOR**

Michael A. Ortiz serves as Executive Director of the International Council for Evangelical Theological Education (ICETE) and as Vice President for Global Ministries and Professor of Missiology and Intercultural Ministries at Dallas Theological Seminary. A missiologist and theological educator, he has served in academic and ministry leadership roles focused on global theological education, intercultural ministry, and the equipping of the worldwide church, bringing together theological scholarship and a commitment to collaboration across diverse expressions of theological education.

SUMMARY OF GACX

The Global Alliance for Church Multiplication

GACX is a vision-inspired community of organizations pursuing the same vision together: a healthy, sustainable, and multiplying church for every 1,000 people.

The alliance began in 2011, when five ministries agreed to work together in church planting rather than in parallel. Fifteen years later, GACX is a global alliance of more than 130 member churches, mission organizations, and national alliances, built not on uniformity of method but on unity of vision.

VISION

A healthy, multiplying, and sustainable church for every 1,000 people on earth—in every village, neighborhood, high-rise, and digital space.

MISSION

To inspire and facilitate organizational collaboration for church multiplication, providing a global community where member organizations work together.

GETTING INVOLVED Four places to begin, whether or not your organization is part of the alliance.

1 See who is already at the table.

The member directory is searchable by ministry activity and by whether an organization implements or accelerates church multiplication. gacx.io/members

2 Come to the Forum.

The annual gathering is where trust is built and partnerships form; regional and topical meetings run through the year. gacx.io/events

3 Bring your organization in.

Open to churches, mission agencies, non-profits, and other incorporated entities, as implementers or accelerators. gacx.io/membership

4 Tell the story of a collaboration.

The alliance shares accounts of organizations working together—the best argument for collaboration is a partnership that worked. gacx.io/why-gacx/stories

No single organization—however gifted or well-connected—can reach every people and place on earth. The vision is God’s, and he has always built his church through people willing to work together.

“May they all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us, so that the world may believe you sent me.”

JOHN 17:21 (CSB)



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