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7-13-2022

## Healing Christ's Fragmented Body Through Communal Discipleship: A Review of From Isolation to Community

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### Recommended Citation

Perigo, A. (2022). Healing Christ's Fragmented Body Through Communal Discipleship: A Review of From Isolation to Community. Retrieved from [https://digitalcollections.dordt.edu/staff\\_work/112](https://digitalcollections.dordt.edu/staff_work/112)

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## Healing Christ's Fragmented Body Through Communal Discipleship: A Review of From Isolation to Community

### Abstract

"In slow attention akin to a patient gardener attending her plants, we attend to one another in a Christ-like posture of humility and curiosity."

Posting about the book *From Isolation to Community* from *In All Things* - an online journal for critical reflection on faith, culture, art, and every ordinary-yet-graced square inch of God's creation.

<https://inallthings.org/healing-christs-fragmented-body-through-communal-discipleship-a-review-of-from-isolation-to-community/>

### Keywords

In All Things, book review, From Isolation to Community, vision, Christian life, Myles Werntz

### Disciplines

Christianity

### Comments

*In All Things* is a publication of the [Andreas Center for Reformed Scholarship and Service at Dordt University](#).

# Healing Christ's Fragmented Body Through Communal Discipleship: A Review of *From Isolation to Community*

Angela Perigo

**July 13, 2022**

**Title:** From Isolation to Community: A Renewed Vision for Christian Life Together

**Author:** Myles Werntz

**Publisher:** Baker Academic

**Publishing Date:** April 12, 2022

**Pages:** 208 (Hardcover)

**ISBN:** 978-1540965370

It was a blistering ninety-five degree day with no shade in sight for me, my husband, my three kids, or the other ten-thousand gathered at The Send for twelve hours of prayer and worship. Having just read this book, I was on high alert for practices of isolation.

What impacted me most wasn't the sunburn afterward, but the incredible number of times those leading on stage had us pull out our phones to activate a response to what was being presented to pray for. They had QR codes ready for us to scan, and my family pretty much responded to everything from an interest in foster care to leading a junior high small group. What I find both so moving (and honestly) equally annoying is in the weeks since the event, I have received dozens of personal emails and Zoom calls holding me accountable to my prayers, offering local community support, and committing to praying with me. Their intentional ability to move thousands from a bunch of individuals in a crowd into the organic body of Christ on mission is what is unfolding before me, and what Myles Werntz's most recent book is devoted to unpacking. Praying for those suffering with food insecurity alongside a huge crowd is vastly different than receiving a personal phone call ensuring that me and my kids actually put 'skin to our prayers' by serving with the local food pantry on Wednesday afternoon.

In our unprecedented age of artificial digital connectedness juxtaposed with the stark reality of how separated we truly are from others, *From Isolation to Community: A Renewed Vision for Christian Life Together* explores the separation within creation order and how church community practices have the power to equally fragment or equally heal the individual and the community.

Isolation is the common thread woven into the very fabric of creation through the entrance of sin. Using Bonhoeffer's framework of church as a healing presence within local communities,

Werntz offers a compelling vision of the how the body of Christ meant for union with God can undo our state of isolation through “the day together” and “the day apart” practices of the gathered and scattered church. A church community being knit into one body in Christ is then elucidated, and for both Bonhoeffer and Werntz, “God comes to us in and through the very creaturely life in which we operate as isolated beings, offering a vision beyond solidarity... the undoing of our fractured, divided state of sin occurs hand in hand with being given a new community in which all people are knit together with one another in a very different fashion: the community of the church, Christ’s own body.”<sup>1</sup> Cogently put forth by the author, embodying life-in-community as creatures designed for love and togetherness by the triune God is the only way to heal the fragments of the world from the wounds of isolation.

Yet participation in community is not simple; community, especially, can create and perpetuate isolation. Evidenced in our practices of self-removal, sin takes on both individual and communal forms. With theological acumen, Wertz describes with laser point precision how church life has been and continues in embedded practices that perpetuate the very wounds the body of Christ is designed to heal.

In churches designed with the individual in mind, the body of Christ caters to the exclusive preferences of personality, where individual ideas (of God, of Scripture, of church, etc.) are idolized above communal discernment. In churches designed for the crowds, one can settle into the anonymity of a group’s vision, voice, and ethos without it demanding much. There is a cost of both kinds of hiding: “Whereas the individualist presumption places too much on the Christian—asking them to be an excellent hermeneut, interpreter, moral authority, and arbiter—the crowd presumption takes the opposite approach (albeit toward the same end) in asking too little of the Christian.”<sup>2</sup> These approaches to church life fundamentally fail because neither can possibly live as the body of Christ as he intended.

If we are to shift our vision from the purpose of cultivating community to “the healing of the body of Christ from this primal wound, this isolation that is the mark of sin, so that we might participate in Christ’s own work: to heal a creation broken and isolated by the fall,”<sup>3</sup> then how we gather and what we do when we gather matters immensely. The remainder of the book carefully details a “theological therapy” away from isolation through intentional, contextualized practices of renewing common life and restructuring private life within church-community.

In slow attention akin to a patient gardener attending her plants, we attend to one another in a Christ-like posture of humility and curiosity. The ever-growing depth of contextual and organic relationality is how God designed our healing. As we are knitted back into the life-giving body of Christ, we become embodied carriers of the cure from isolation’s toxins. Turned to one another and not away from, together we learn Scripture, together we confess sin, together we receive Communion, together we pray intercessions, together we sing. Gathered or scattered, we live out these practices together.

Written especially for those currently involved in church leadership at any level, *From Isolation to Community* brings much needed clarity to why we are feeling so isolated and how to heal our brokenness. If you or anyone you know has ever questioned how to heal the isolation currently fragmenting the body of Christ, this book has answers! However, remember that true healing is not cheap or easy, and it is here that I feel overwhelmed at the radical overhaul of church practices that Wertz is suggesting. Taking the first step towards wholeness through reorienting our lives towards each other isn't meant to be a total overnight overhaul. Wertz suggests we begin through faithful turning to each other, and this kind of embodied discipleship is what Eugene Peterson notably calls 'a long obedience in the same direction'. Wertz left me with glimmers of hope through his practical development of communal accountability in our life together and life apart, as these practices ultimately do not depend on us.

Thanks be to God, that the gravitational power of Jesus' life, death, resurrection, and ascension has accomplished victory over isolation's destructive, fragmenting forces through our union with Christ. As Jesus draws all things into himself, may our church-communities reflect this oneness to bear witness in creation until the redemption of all things.

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1. Myles Werntz, *From Isolation to Community: A Renewed Vision for Christian Life Together* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic), 21.
  2. Werntz, *From Isolation to Community*, 60.
  3. Werntz, *From Isolation to Community*, 47.