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*When Collaboration Mirrors the Trinity:*

*Leveraging Unity to Bless Our World*

by Avery Stafford

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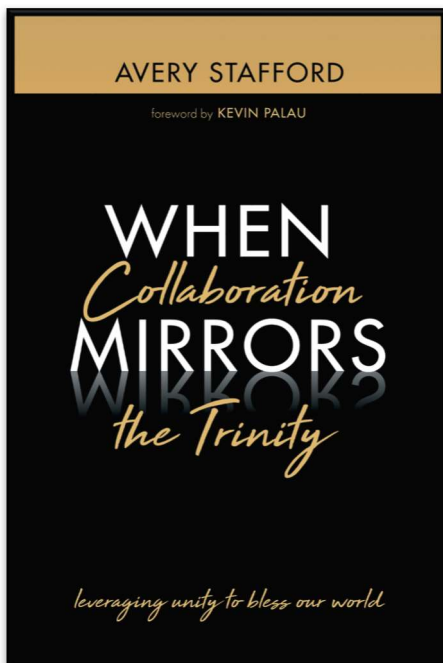
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## **A Fractured Church in Fractured Times— A Call for the Church to be Better!**

*Avery Stafford's New Title, When Collaboration Mirrors the Trinity: Leveraging Unity to Bless Our World, points the way.*

“That they all may be one” was Jesus’ first-century prayer. With mind and emotions set towards Golgotha, he poured out his heart to the Father. But what is our twenty-first-century reality?



Local churches are siloed. Pastors do not know one another and rarely work together. Christians drive by church buildings on their way to Sunday worship and seldom pray for one another. Vitriolic disunity spews across social media in front of an onlooking world. Our culture sees our fractured reality and increasingly dismisses Christianity as a viable option for their lives. And it is time for believers to recognize that it is our fault.

But there is hope! *When Collaboration Mirrors the Trinity* is a timely invitation for local churches to make the practice of unity our new normal. Avery Stafford presents a biblical model to actualize this invitation. He details four rhythms that mirror the loving community of the Triune God. Each one can help pastors, lay leaders, and faith communities deepen their resolve to bless the world through effective gospel partnerships. This work is a bold call for believers to discover an untapped resource for the gospel—the believers who attend other churches in their city.

**Avery Stafford** is Lead Pastor at Common Ground Church in Beaverton, Oregon, and an adjunct faculty member at Multnomah Biblical Seminary in Portland. He is a graduate of Abilene Christian University (1992) and holds an MA in Pastoral Studies and a DMin from Multnomah Biblical Seminary (1998, 2020). He is also an award-winning songwriter and music recording artist with six albums to his credit.



## Interview with Avery Stafford

### **Describe yourself in one word?**

When describing myself in one word, I usually respond with “bridge-builder.” Godly people have always been important to me. Many have poured countless time and energy into my life, which is a testament to God’s grace and favor. I am committed to doing the same for others. I want people to discover the depths of the love of God in their lives. In that sense, I am a bridge-builder.

### **What is your professional and educational background?**

I have worked in pastoral ministries for over thirty years in California, Texas, Washington, and Oregon. Since 2015, I have served as Lead Pastor for Common Ground Church in Beaverton, OR. I hold a Bachelor of Science in Christian Ministry from Abilene Christian University (92), a Master of Arts in Pastoral Studies from Multnomah Biblical Seminary (98), and a Doctor of Ministry in Missional Leadership from Multnomah (2020).

### **Why did you decide to write a book?**

I want believers to take Jesus' prayer more seriously—"that they might be one." Writing my doctoral thesis presented a unique opportunity to dive into this subject, complete my doctorate, and use my work as a primer for a book.

### **How did you choose church collaboration as the subject?**

In 2017, Common Ground moved to a church campus where six other autonomous congregations worshiped weekly in central Beaverton. My assumption was that combining our gospel efforts would be easy for us. I was wrong. That experience over a two-year period became the case study for the thesis. Our circumstances made the subject of church collaboration an easy choice.

### **What makes your book compelling?**

I wrote the book that I wanted to read but could not find anywhere. It is an honest look at the big "C" Church through the eyes of an African American pastor in twenty-first-century America who is fluently bilingual in Black and White culture. This work is rooted in biblical theology. It was written during a worldwide revolution for racial justice, a global pandemic, and the most volatile presidential campaign of my generation. It acknowledges what I believe is systematic disunity in the body of Christ and our missed

opportunities to share the gospel. But it also offers hope and a way forward. Every believer or interested party will engage right away.

### **Where can we purchase the book?**

Wipf & Stock

<https://wipfandstock.com/9781666710656/when-collaboration-mirrors-the-trinity/>

Amazon

<https://www.amazon.com/When-Collaboration-Mirrors-Trinity-Leveraging/dp/1666710652>

### **How can we contact you?**

<https://averystafford.com/contact>

An Excerpt from *When Collaboration Mirrors the Trinity: Leveraging Unity to Bless Our World*

A multitude of believers are anxious for something different.

Their timing could not be more perfect.

We are living in an incredible time in human history when God's church can work together to bless the nations and, in the process, reset our narrative. Now is our time to be the church that looks like heaven. And offering a biblical and practical way forward is the task of this project.

The rest of this work will reimagine local churches embracing collaboration as a normative practice of unity. Specifically, I will promote a culture of collaboration that mirrors the loving unity of the Trinity.

Our discussion will envision what congregations can achieve together if their leaders highly value this kind of collaboration. Such a reimagined church would recast our reputation as the people who always work together in unity.

But let us not kid ourselves . . .

We will never get to collaboration if we cannot find our way to unity—even in disagreement!

So, this work also serves as a clarion call for Christian leaders to initiate new kingdom relationships, build new trust narratives, and leverage those narratives to pursue the gospel in their cities.

Every church will not be able to collaborate with everyone, but every church should collaborate with someone! And when your collaboration mirrors the Trinity, it is a work powered by the very definition of love—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. It helps us to fulfill Jesus' desire for his believers to be one. Yes, it only took me nine minutes and twenty-nine seconds to see that the church is not one. But it also only took one prayer from Jesus to convince me that we must be one!

If you decide to read on, you will encounter moments when the Holy Spirit will tap you on the noggin. Pay close attention to his stirrings. When it happens, you can either resist and excuse away why churches silo and remain strangers, or you can press into that moment. Remember, we have arrived where we are by doing what we have done. If you believe, like me, that Christ wants something different for his people, then stay with me while we talk about doing something different. I want him to do transformative work in your life like he continues to do in mine. After all, he is in the life-transformation business. Since collaboration is so important to me, it makes sense to begin this book by telling you why. So instead of leaving you in suspense, let us get to it.

**Praise for *When Collaboration Mirrors the Trinity: Leveraging Unity to Bless Our World***

“The American church has never really come to terms with our unity in Jesus. . . . Stafford’s book is a clarion call to the church of Jesus to return to Jesus so that his dream—for one people of God living and proclaiming the gospel of hope in a polarized and broken world—can be realized in our day and time.”

**—Rick McKinley, Lead Pastor, Imago Dei Community**

“Stafford reminds us that Christians must hang together or we will certainly hang separately. His call for collaboration is badly needed in a post-Christian society. We must take seriously his call for unity and find ways to work together as the body of Christ. Use Stafford’s effort to inspire you to take the intentional steps necessary to become truly one in Christ.”

**—George Yancey, Professor of Sociology, Baylor University**

“As an African American female pastor, I found great comfort and wisdom in Pastor Avery’s words. He beautifully weaves together Scripture with our cultural realities to exhort and bring healing to the church, highlighting hope in the midst of heartbreak. Every personal story, observation, and critique points us back to the importance of our relationship with Jesus and one another, serving as an anchor for the church—present and future.”

**—Ashley Bell, Global & Local Outreach Pastor, Cedar Mill Bible Church**

“Stafford’s writing reveals that he spends quality time in the timeless presence of divinity within the Trinity. His gospel-saturated book calls local churches and pastors to engage in Christ-centered collaboration instead of religious competition and racial contempt. . . . Stafford is right to believe that when churches collaborate through Christ, they are empowered to join the triumphant Christ in his assaulting march upon the collapsing gates of hell.”

**—Jerry Taylor, Associate Professor, Abilene Christian University**

“Avery Stafford is serving the church well by reminding us that while Jesus was on his way to the cross, he stopped to pray for the unity of his disciples. Through that highlight of its importance and the model of the Trinity itself, we learn four rhythms that are important for the church. I think you will be surprised and challenged, as I was, as you wrestle through these concepts while asking yourself, ‘Do others know I’m Jesus’ disciple as Jesus defined it?’”

**—David Whitaker, President, Venture Church Network**

