

MESSAGE TRANSCRIPT //

INTENTIONAL COMMUNITY | CUMULATIVE EFFECT

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If this is your first time with us, maybe the first time in a while, we've been in this series *The Cumulative Effect*. And what we've been saying is that as we grow in our faith, as we grow spiritually, formation of any kind doesn't happen overnight, but it happens over time. And we've been referencing this verse in 2 Corinthians. I love the way Paul says it. He says:

"Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit."
2 Corinthians 3:16-18 (ESV)

I wish it wasn't the case sometimes, that transformation and growth happen one degree at a time. I don't know about you, but that's what I have seen. It's not an overnight thing. It's day in and day out and year after year.

What we've been doing in this series is just kind of highlighting different areas of our lives: parenting, marriage, work. And today we're going to talk about the cumulative effect when it comes to intentional community—intentional community.

Community is powerful. And I want you to think back to the best times in your life, the best seasons. Chances are it's because you were surrounded by an incredible group of people. On the other side, if you look back, maybe the hardest parts of your life and the toughest seasons were because of the community that surrounded you or the lack thereof.

I just want to make a special shout out here to the youth, as we talk about intentional community. I'm talking middle school and high school students. I know that community is hard for all of us, but for you, you're in a very delicate eco system of community. And maybe you're in a place where you're trying to figure out, "Where are my people? Where can I find community? Where can I find a place where I belong?" I just want to point you to Traders Point Youth. Traders Point Youth would love to have you. We would love to invite you into that community on Sunday nights. Check out the website. You can get all of the information that you need.



Community is a big deal. I love the way that pastor and theologian Eugene Peterson says it. He says:

“There can be no maturity in the spiritual life, no obedience in following Jesus, no wholeness in the Christian life, apart from an immersion in, and embrace of, community. I am not myself by myself.”

I am not myself by myself.

That is such a profound line. I am not myself by myself. It takes me and you coming together, me and you sharpening one another, me and you carrying one another when we can't take that next step.

But I also know that when it comes to adults a lot of us are pretty jaded when it comes to community. And I get it. Like I said, community is definitely where some of the best seasons of our lives are found, it's also the reason for a lot of the pain and the struggle, the place where I got burned.

And I know there are a lot of people either watching online or even in the rooms today who are saying, “I'm still with God. I still have my relationship with Him. I still even come, maybe, to church on Sunday, but I've decided to do it without the people side of things.

And I hear you. It's definitely easier in some ways to avoid the people side of things. But I just want to lovingly encourage you, that if that is you, you're missing out on more than you are gaining. And you might just be missing out on the whole point of all of this. You see, when Jesus came it wasn't just for you but He came to usher in this new kingdom where you and I would be together. I love the way that it says it in Titus. Look at this. It says:

“He gave his life to free us,” look at the language here, *“from every kind of sin, to cleanse us, and to make us his very own people, totally committed to doing good deeds.”* Titus 2:14 (NLT)

I think it is important to just begin to adopt the language of the Bible. It is not about the individual, but it is about the collective. It doesn't say that God came so that you would be His person. It says that God came and now we are His people. God is doing something. God is creating this new kingdom and God is forming a new community with me and you. And the language that the Bible uses is beautiful when it talks about this tight knit community coming together. All of us.

It refers to God as a Heavenly Father. And I think we like the idea of a God who loves us and meets us with grace and unconditional love. Now we are His sons and daughters.



It's amazing. But there are two parts of that. We're family. And if God is the Father, then that means you and I are siblings.

We are not only sons and daughters of God, but we are also brothers and sisters of one another.

So turn to the person next to you and say, "Hey family." Some of you just got really bummed, "This is weird family reunion. I'm not getting the t-shirt." But it's this thing that God is forming us into this new, intentional community that He has a very specific purpose for. And He even drove that down if you can go any farther than family, the image that God uses for what this community is going to be like, it's a body.

THE BODY OF CHRIST

It's described as the body of Christ. Think about that. Jesus is the head and then you and I come together and we make the body. And this is the language that he uses. You come in and it's like you're a finger and I'm a toe. And you're the eyes. And you're the ears. And then somehow all of us coming together form a more holistic body.

So for those of you who say, "Hey, you know what? I hear you but I'm just going to step outside of community for a season." Lovingly, I want to say, "No. No. We're going to need that arm." Okay? It's not just yours any more. It's a part of all of us coming together.

My goal today is pretty simple. I want to persuade you to be a part of intentional community and to take the long way around in the day by day, the one degree to the next, of what it's going to take to build intentional community. And you can start today.

The other thing that I want you to do, if you're here and you're like, "I think I have community," I just want you to take your community and place it against what we're going to see from Scripture, what intentional community should look like as we live our lives. And to do this we're going to be in the book of Ecclesiastes—Ecclesiastes chapter 4. If you have your Bibles you can go ahead and flip there.

I'm just going to set us up a little bit. The book of Ecclesiastes is what is called wisdom literature—wisdom literature. And what we see in this very unique writing is that there is this teacher who is kind of looking out and observing the world around him. And over and over again he's not too excited about all of the things that he's seeing. He has this phrase, this word that he uses over and over again 38 times. As he looks out he says this. He says:

Hevel



Can you say that with me? Hevel. It's a Hebrew word that a lot of times gets translated as *meaningless* or *empty* or *void*. And that's true. But the actual picture that this word would have brought up was like one of a vapor or one of smoke. One that almost looks like you could grab it, but as soon as you do, it kind of slips through your finger.

Do you remember sitting in the back seat as a kid and putting your hand out the window and the power of the wind would just push against it and you would try to close your hand but it's just empty? You could never grab it.

So, over the chapters of this book of Ecclesiastes the author just points out all of these things. Over and over again he just says, "Hevel, hevel, hevel." Status, wealth, where we are within society, all of these things he says, "Hevel, hevel, hevel." Pleasure, the things that we live for a lot of times the things that we are busy cooking and we put community on the back burner for, he says, "Hevel, hevel, hevel."

So what we're going to look at today, starting in verse 7, is that he's going to do this once again. He's going to look at something and just know when you see the word *meaningless* he's saying that *hevel* idea. And then he's going to present something that is far from meaningless. So we'll actually bring a lot of meaning to our lives, and that's community. So take a look with me starting in verse 7. He says:

"I observed yet another example of something meaningless under the sun. This is the case of a man who is all alone, without a child or a brother, yet who works hard to gain as much wealth as he can. But then he asks himself, 'Who am I working for? Why am I giving up so much pleasure now?' It is all so meaningless and depressing."

So it's this idea that this old teacher figure is looking out into the community. He sees people who are just working, going crazy, stacking up, amassing wealth, but as they are getting to the end of their lives, they realize that they are all alone. They don't even have anyone to share with or anyone who they are going to be able to leave it to. So when they are gone, all of it is gone.

And he says that that is meaningless. But then he's going to draw a very different picture here in these next few verses of something that is meaningful. Something that can bring meaning into our lives. And it's all around relationships. Take a look at this. In verse 9 it says:

"Two people are better off than one, for they can help each other succeed. If one person falls, the other can reach out and help. But someone who falls alone is in real trouble. Likewise, two people lying close together can keep each other warm. But how can one be warm alone? A person standing alone can be attacked and defeated, but two can

stand back-to-back and conquer. Three are even better, for a triple-braided cord is not easily broken.” Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 (NLT)

So, he lays out all of these other things that are meaningless, but then he kind of drives in. He says there is actually some really good stuff that comes from being in community, being with other people.

So what I want us to do with our time together is to just pull out four things from the text of what intentional community should look like—what it can provide for us and what we should be providing to our intentional community.

And the first one is this. If you’re taking notes:

Intentional community helps us succeed.

An intentional community helps us succeed. That makes sense. Right? That’s logical. If I’m surrounding myself with people, the hope is that because they are around me, I’m better off than I would be alone. I’m more successful. It’s holistic too. The people I am with make me a better husband and father, or wife and mother, friend. And they make me a better entrepreneur. They make me better at my job, holistically.

And I think what you’ll see is a lot of times people who are very successful, they have some of the most intentional communities. They meet regularly. They have coaches. They have people cheering them on and calling them out on things. A lot of times their intentional community is built around success, entrepreneurs, growing things—my business is doing better than it was before. And that’s really good.

But I would say that it is limited. The way that we are looking at it today is within the context of intentional community at a church, as followers of Jesus. As I place myself in this intentional community, here’s the question I’m asking of my group:

Are we becoming more like Jesus?

We’re getting together. We love hanging out together. We love sharing meals. Amazing. But at the end of the day, and the end of the night, at the end of our group from week in to week out, from one degree to the next, am I helping them become more like Jesus? Are they helping me become more like Jesus?

So we see that a part of having an intentional community is having people who rally around you who want to see you succeed. And isn’t that enough alone? In a group. In a world like this. To have people that you know who are rooting and cheering for you.



Right? (Seems to me you don't know how to cheer because you've never heard anybody celebrate you. That's why you need intentional community.)

The second thing is:

Intentional community helps us when we fall.

What the author of Ecclesiastes points to over and over again is that life seems so unfair at times. And most of our lives it seems like we've been stumbling or falling. And sometimes we fall because of our own bad decisions, but sometimes we get brought to our knees by circumstances that are out of our control and we fall.

What the author here is pointing to is you need somebody on the other side. You need somebody who is walking with you so when you fall, because you will, you're not going to fall alone. And I think a lot of us, right now, if we're being honest and if the picture here is remotely accurate, most of us don't have anybody to call when we fall. Most of us don't have anyone to reach out to when things are going bad in our lives. We haven't formed that intentional community. So a lot of times we just fall farther and farther.

What I just want to do right now is to give you a tool. A tool to help build intentional community. And it's okay if you don't have names for any of these spaces. But this is part of what it is going to look like if you want intentional community. We've got to start filling in these circles. So the first circle that... I would say if we're going to be serious about having intentional relationships and building them, we're going to start with that first circle, which is:

GOD

We need at all times to make sure that our relationship with God is good. Because how that vertical relationship is will completely set the tone for who I'm going to be in these other circles, how I am going to be able to present myself in these communities, what I can offer. What I'm willing to share is largely dependent on my relationship with God. So I'm building this community, I'm starting with God as the foundation.

The next circle I would say is:

CLOSE FRIENDS (3-6)

And I think this is the circle that is tough for a lot of people. We've got a lot of associates. We've got a lot of people who kind of know us. We have a lot of people we like to post with on social media. But these few people, these are the people I'm talking about—the 3 a.m. people. When life really hits hard, when you have nowhere to go, when

you are a blubbering mess who can you call and you know is going to pick up on that phone? Who are the people when something good happens in your life, you want to share it with them? Who is closest in your life?

The next circle, as we continue to expand out, I would say is:

CHURCH (25-50)

Church. I'm very specific on this and I know that not all of your relationships are in the church. But I would say that your closest relationships should exist within the church. Once again, just from that foundational level. If the most important thing in my life is becoming more like Jesus, people outside of the church are going to love me in a lot of different ways, but they're never really going to be concerned about how much I look like Jesus—how much am I growing to be like Him.

And then there would just be so much overlap if our relationships and our close relationships can be found within the church. We believe in this so much. It's like a whole section of our church and our staff work on this. It's called life-giving relationships. Because we know we cannot force you into any kind of relationship. It would get weird really quick, "You guys are going to be best friends now. Your welcome."

But what we can do is create environments where that's likely to happen. So that's what we do. That's what groups are, environments where life-giving relationships can happen. That's what Rooted is. It's a place where live-giving relationships can happen. That's what serving is in some instances. When you are serving here on a weekend, it's not just the people that you are serving, it's people who you are growing with and you're sharpening one another as you stand shoulder to shoulder.

These are all spaces, as I'm looking to fill these circles, of who do I want in here? Who am I going to invest into and who do I want to speak into my life? And then that final circle, I would just say:

CONTACTS (75-100)

This is the idea of people who are in my phone, people who I work with, who I at least have their number. Maybe we get together a few times a year. But I need that group of people because there might be some people that eventually I move into one of those smaller circles. Just contacts.

And I'll give you this pro tip. If someone gives you his number, immediately save it. Because one of the worst things is when you get something from someone, a text message, and clearly he saved your number but you didn't save his—now you have to



play this real life game of guess who to figure out who's on the other side of it. Because you can't be like, "And who is this?" It's like, "Who do I know from Jackson, Mississippi? You've got to ask a lot of questions. Like, "How's everything going?" Hoping that he will give you some kind of clue about work, or family—who this mystery person is.

But as you look at these circles it's okay, no matter where you are. We just want to be intentional about building them. And the first circle we've already got you covered. God goes there. You're welcome. You're already on phase two. Close group of friends, "Do I have it? Do I need to have an intentional conversation with someone this week to say, 'Hey, look. I know I can't do life alone. I want to invite you into this relationship where I'm going to expect more of you and I want you to expect more of me as well.'"

Church, we have these Next Steps walls all over our church where you can go and scan a bar code and you can place yourself in one of these environments to begin building those relationships. Alright?

So, where are you? We don't have intentional relationships because we don't plan for them. And we don't design them. So this week really begin to fill in these circles and say, "Where am I?" And be honest about it.

I've said that one reason why we don't have this is because we don't plan for it. The other one is:

We desire intentional community without allowing ourselves to be fully known.

This is a big one. This is a big one. And here's what this looks like in a relationship, "I'm afraid to tell you that I've fallen. I'm worried about how you will receive me if I am completely honest and open with how much I am struggling."

I see this all of the time. And I'll be honest with you. Most of the conversations I have people at our church who are disgruntled about the lack of community that they have, it's this, "I'm tired of going to group every week and all we do is talk about surface level stuff. I cannot pray for someone's grandmother's dog again. It never moves past that. And then we don't talk again until the next week, until the next ice breaker." And they say, "It just doesn't feel like community." And it's not. But as long as we just throw up this superficial version of us, we're never going to have intentional community because:

No one can have a real relationship with the fake you.

No one can have a real relationship with the fake you. This means that we're going to have to get vulnerable. This means that we're going to have to share. And maybe you're asking, "How can I know if I share what I'm really going through that they will accept



me?" You can't. That's the tension that we live in. We have this desire to be both fully known and loved, but we have this fear, "I have to choose because I don't know if I can truly be known and loved at the same time."

But the framework, because of Jesus, the framework of a family, of a body, is this idea, "You can come to me. This is a place where you belong. I will meet you right where you are. And this is a safe place where we can grow together. You don't have to pretend to be somebody. We have that here."

The next thing that I would say intentional community provides is this:

Intentional community brings us comfort.

It brings comfort. The way that it talks about it here in the Scripture is that if one person lies down, he can't keep himself warm. But when two people lay down together, now they can provide comfort to one another.

But there is a time where maybe it's divisive. This is a book. It's a book of wisdom. It works most of the time. Sometimes I've seen this, maybe you've experienced this too as a married couple. Sometimes you lay down and you can actually get too warm. This other person is so hot and the other person is so cold. And you put them together and it's zero fun. It's like, "What are you doing? Why are you so hot?"

"Why are you so cold? Are you alive? Why do your toe nails feel like that? Why do they feel like jagged rocks?"

"Because I rip them off with my fingers and now they just are." (Hypothetically)

But this is this idea that when we come together, I provide comfort to you. I provide you with something that you could not provide for yourself. And if you look through the Scriptures, the New Testament specifically, it is filled with life being done like this. This is what the church was marked by:

One Another

This is a phrase that is used over and over again. It calls for how we live in this intentional community we call church. It's one another. You can do a study this week to look at all of the different ones, but I just want to give you a few. And you can take a screen shot of this when we're done. Here are just a few of the one anothers, the way that we bring comfort to one another in our relationships.

Romans 12:10- Honor one another.

We honor one another.

Galatians 6:2- Share each other's burdens.

We share each other's burdens. Here's this idea that if I'm trying to carry a couch by myself, it's really difficult to do. But if you get up on that other side, we can carry this thing together. It is much easier.

Hebrews 10:24- Stir one another up to acts of love and good works.

So it's not just that I have people in my life when things are going bad and I'm kind of falling and I need somebody to help me up. No. It's when I'm up they are making me better. They are encouraging me. They are motivating me. They are inspiring me to do more with my life and to give more of myself. And then here's one:

James 5:16 Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed.

Once again we're coming back to that place of transparency, "I'm going to open myself up to you, I'm going to confess my sins to you. I don't want to say this out loud, but I'm going to trust that you are not going to meet me with condemnation. You're going to meet me in this moment and you're going to encourage me. You're going to point some things out, but then you're going to pray over me. And I'm going to trust you with all of that."

And then the next one just kind of an over-blanket type of thing. We're going to:

Galatians 5:13- Serve one another.

We're going to serve one another in this intentional relationship, in this intentional community. We are doing things for one another. We are bringing comfort to one another.

And I just want to say, a lot of times in life-giving relationships it's incredible. There are big highs, there is encouragement, there are text messages, there are people cheering you on and clapping and celebrating your name and pushing you, and it's amazing.

But at the same time intentional community is not just a bunch of yes men or yes women. They are people who you are inviting into your life to convict you. They are people you are inviting into your life and you're saying, "You see my blind spots. I need

you to call them out. Can you do that for me?" And then you have to let them do that for you.

It reminds me of Proverbs 27:6, that the wounds of a friend can be trusted.

You know over the past month or two now, I've been really struggling with some back pain. I was working out. I mean, you guys know how it goes. Right? And I messed up the left side of my back. And I was like, "Oh, that's a real bummer." And I waited a little bit. It got better. I started working out again. Messed up the right side of my back. This was beyond me. I needed some help with this situation.

So, there is a physical therapist at our West campus. I'm having a conversation with him and I'm like, "I'm struggling." And he invited me in to get checked out. I tell him what's going on. I said, "I'm lifting weights." He's like, "How much are you lifting?" I was like, "I don't think that is important. I messed up the left side and then I messed up the right side."

And he said, "Okay. It sounds like it's your pelvis." I said, "Okay." And he said, "We're going to have to check your pelvis. Do you know how we do that?"

"No. I could imagine."

He said, "Well, we're going to start with your ankles."

"That's way better than what I had in my mind, Let's do it your way." So he checked my ankles, and yeah, one is longer than the other. He says, "Okay, we're going to need to reset your pelvis today."

"Alright. Let's get into it."

And he starts moving me around, pushing one way and then I can't tell you what happened next. I know my knees are up and he tells me to squeeze and in a moment he sent lightening through my body, through the most inner parts of who I am. And I audibly gasped. I was like, "Oh, ho, ho."

He said, "Yeah, I couldn't tell you because then you wouldn't have done it." And I was like, "Yeah, that's fair." But then he said this. He said, "You might hate me today, but you'll love me tomorrow."

And what I want to say about life-giving relationships, about intentional community is, sometimes it's going to feel like getting your pelvis reset. Welcome to Traders Point. But



it's this idea that I know that it is not for my harm, but it's for my good. I'm going to be challenged, convicted, but I know that at the end of the day I'm going to be comforted.

While I have you here, I just want to encourage you to come back next week. Next week is this special interview with someone who goes to our church and her story. She and I, as a pastor, would sit down and talk about what it was like to bring comfort to her husband who battled ALS. There is a sweet part to her story too. It is all about community and how she opened the doors and how people surrounded her and she was able to do what she never would have been able to do alone. That's the first part.

The second part is Mother's Day is next Sunday. Write that down. Buy something. Get plans ready. This is your infomercial. I saved you. You're welcome. No excuses. But make sure that you come back for that.

Here's the last thing that I want to say that intentional community brings. It helps us to withstand ongoing attacks. Maybe you're in this season right now where you're like, "Hey, life is actually going pretty good. I don't know if I need as many people as I did in that season or when I was really struggling or when I was trying to make it or when it was really early on."

I just want to encourage you that the hits are going to keep on coming. There is going to be a new thing that shows up.

I saw this thing this past week that said, "Adulthood is pretty much just continuously saying, 'Hey, I can't wait for next week for things to slow down.' And then you die." That's the whole, that's the whole thing.

But it's this idea that I'm going to surround myself, I'm going to stand shoulder to shoulder with people. When the attacks come, that would have taken me down if I was by myself, now that I have people around me, I can withstand them. And now I'm moving. So people are not having to pick me up from the ground, I'm getting hit but I'm still moving forward.

So here's the question I have for you. Do you have that? When you think about your community, your people, how does it compare to the intentional community that we see in Ecclesiastes? Here's just a summary of that:

To help us succeed;
To help us when we fall;
To bring us comfort;
To help us to withstand ongoing attacks.



These are the things that should be true of our communities. These are the things that we should be provided, they are coming to us, and the things that we provide to one another. That's the homework this week. To begin to identify and build that intentional community, because it changes literally everything. And it would bring so much meaning and so much fullness to your life. The good things become better. And the hard things actually become manageable when we have other people.

You know, this has really stuck out to me over the past few years of how important it is to be surrounded by community. It shaped where we live. A few years ago we were looking to move and I had some ideas of where we were going to go. And things went left. Then we had an opportunity to move and to live one house down from some of my best friends.

Now, it wasn't in the district we were looking at, it wasn't in the place in town. But how often do you get to have your best friends one house down? And on top of that, some others of our best friends were about five minutes down the road. And some others were 10 minutes down the road. It really kind of laid this on me, "I want real community where I can be transparent. We can be together. That proximity matters." That was the best decision I've made. To have people who are literally built into my street, people who I can look to and people who hold me up, people I can lean on in different seasons.

I mean, this is the whole reason why we went multi-site. Maybe you've wondered that, "Why are there so many of these locations? Who do you think you are?" We don't go to these places, necessarily, even foremost to reach new people. The reason we start these campuses is because people are already there. There were people who live in that community who were driving 20, 30, 40 minutes, an hour, to get to another campus.

So we said, "Hey, that's no place... Community can't live like that." So we go to where the people are. New communities are formed. And people who once couldn't come to a church are now coming to a church because their neighbors are inviting them.

And it's not the distance thing, it's actually doing life together. That's what we're seeing at the multi-sites. That's why we keep going. That's why we are not stopping, because community matters.

The other thing that I want to put out in front of you is, if you're here and you don't believe in Jesus, if you're just here and you're on the fringes for one reason or another, I just want to say, if you take those of all of the things that are found in community, if you build those circles of intentionality, your life will be better. You will have friendships. But it won't be complete. Because the only thing that makes these relationships move like they should and withstand the amount that they can withstand and help shape us into the image that God has created us in is Jesus.



Jesus is the foundation. Jesus is that first circle. From that relationship all other relationships are built. And if you are here today you need to know that. God wants a relationship with you. No matter what community you're from. No matter what past you have, with Him, without a doubt, you can be fully known and fully loved. He wants to be in an intentional relationship with you.

Look at the way it closed out in Ecclesiastes, chapter 4. He says:

"Three are even better, for a triple-braided cord is not easily broken." Ecclesiastes 4:12b (NLT)

A lot of scholars and theologians agree the third piece of that cord is God, Himself. In our relationships we don't have to do them with just me and you but He wants to be a part of them. Our God wants to be with us.

If you look at Jesus' prayer in John 17, look at this. It says:

"I pray," these are the words of Jesus, *"that they will all be one, just as you and I are one—as you are in me, Father, and I am in you. And may they be in us so that the world will believe you sent me."*

Capture this. There is a God of this universe, Creator of all things, and what He wants is a people to call His own. What He wants is for you to be in a relationship with Him, for Him to be in you and you to be in Him. This is where our identity is found. This is where our worth is found. Not in the communities we come from, not in the communities we never thought we could fit into, but from this community, from God, Himself.

Which starts with this, you are made in the image of God. You belong. You are worth everything. Your value is not determined by what you do or what's been done to you. Your value is already determined on the cross, which screams to a watching world that you are worth dying for. And it didn't end there. Jesus lived life for you and died for you, welcoming you into this new community with God, Himself. He will fill you with His Holy Spirit.

God will come and live inside of us so that we can be equipped and empowered and brought into a relationship with Jesus to be filled and then to go out and pour ourselves out living in community with one another as brothers and sisters. In this new community, that's what we get.

And I just want to encourage you today, if you have not stepped into that community, let it be today. Do not leave here without talking to someone. What we want to do right now



is just pray—pray. And I pray that God would just nudge you and today would be the day that you step into this new community that is for you.

Would you pray with us?

God, thank You so much for all that You have done, for all that You are. God, for how You moved and what You've made possible. God, don't let us short-change the life You have for us. Don't let us believe for a second that we can do it alone or that we should do it alone. God, don't let us believe for a second that we would not be met with anything other than grace and love from You.

And, God, we pray right now for anyone in the room who has not received that love, who is not walking in an intentional community with You. God, I pray that that could happen right now. Make that prayer your own, "Jesus, I want to be in a relationship with You."

Father, strengthen us. Heal us. Unite us. Bring us together. Let us be Your body. Father, we love You so much. Thank You for the gift of community. It's in Your perfect and holy name we pray. Amen.

