



From 1968 until 2001 a quirky guy named Mr. Rogers hosted a kid's show on TV. The show began with him saying, "*Good morning Girls and Boys,*" and then while zipping up his cardigan sweater and tying his sneakers he sang the famous song, "Won't you be...won't you be my neighbour?" How the program lasted so long, I will never know. But maybe it is because in his gentle voice he kept inviting kids to become a part of a neighbourhood and become his friend. Actually, if you think about it, what made Mr. Roger's programs popular is exactly what makes Facebook so popular; it is because there is a deep craving within all of us to be known, to be connected in community and to have friendships around us where we feel carried for, valued and needed.

I think the reason that the Facebook and Twitter phenomena has exploded as it has, is because we live in a society that has systematically made so many feel isolated. We drive home from work alone in our cars, drive into our attached garages not even saying hello to our neighbours, turn on our cable TV, punch in the movie we want to see and cocoon alone inside our homes. How did this happen? Well it happened because of how our communities have been designed as 'bedroom communities' rather than a 'community that is the center of interaction and community involvement'. And it happened because many people who begin with a large number of friends in their early teens and 20's seem to narrow their friendships as they date and narrow them even more as they are engaged and become married. Then when kids come along and jobs get more hectic they find that when the time crunch happens, they choose to spend what little free time they have with their own family (while that is good) and end up letting their friendships fall away. While we desire to be connected and some may feel connected because they have 543 people on their friends list in their Facebook, to be honest, you can't be a great friend if all you share with your twitter friends is 140-character comments about what you are doing. This is why I believe that when we look at what our core values should be as a church, number three should be "connected in community."

Let me review where we have journeyed the last few weeks. We have said that in order for our Mission statement to be lived out, which is "To Love Jesus and Touch the World," some things need to increasingly be a part of our walk together as Christ followers. First, we need to personally and collectively be experiencing God. That experience may take many forms - it could be when going through a circumstance that scripture or God guides you as you make a decisions or it could be that you have a dream or vision and have one of those God moments that shakes your life. But because God is real and because He desires to be involved in our lives there will be times when God comes close. The result of experiencing God should be number 2 that our lives are being transformed and changed. Last week, we heard a testimony from Ryan, who spoke of how God is transforming his life and how he has gotten free from alcohol addiction. And then if you were here you will remember that I gave you a piece of paper as you came in and asked you to write a before and afterwards testimony on it about how God has been transforming your life. The amazing thing was that by the end of the 11 am service the entire front steps were full of your notes of how God has been transforming your lives. That means that when you stopped to take a look, you realized that not only had God been at work in your life but He has also been involved in the

lives of many of those who are sitting close to you and those who are in your Brentview neighbourhood.

Can I take a moment and introduce you to some of the people who are in your neighbourhood a Brentview? Sitting beside you are people who have driven over 300 km/hr on a motorcycle on the Autobahn, people who drive dragsters, people who oversaw the building of huge power plants in Australia, people who built Bankers Hall downtown here in Calgary, people who can fly planes, people who have built businesses, people who are retired and people who are struggling to find a job. People who can find the right bolt for a project, fix a water heater, install windows, who can sell you insurance, a mortgage, a set of tires or could perform heart surgery. People who have 8 kids or no kids, people who were home schooled, mission schooled, one room schooled and public schooled. People born in Ethiopia, Cameroon, Japan, Philippines, China, Pakistan or South Africa. People who have worked in Dubai, Alaska, Germany, China, Hong Kong and Brazil. People who have gone on mission trips to Mexico, Ireland, Belize, Brazil, Madagascar and Sudan. People who speak Hausa, Taegu, Ukrainian, Nova Scotian, French and German. People who have gone through the loss of a loved one, had cancer treatment, have had a divorce, time in jail, are newly married or have been married for over 60 years. People who have been Catholic, Anglican, Alliance, Baptist, Mormon, Sheiks and atheists. And people who show testimony cards — last card that you read said “Content with Loneliness” and then it flipped to “In Love in Community.”

As I read those cards, my heart is stirred and I am reminded again why I want to be in relationship with these people. We are united not because of music choice, location in the city, a socio-economic standing, political belief or even theology; we are connected because we share an encounter with Jesus. God has orchestrated situations and circumstances to place us together. And God placed us HERE so that some specific needs will be met, eternal tasks will be tackled, growth in faith made possible and because He wants to bless us with friends who we can walk through life with. The PROCESS is that as we have an Experience with God, our lives are Transformation by God and so we become Connected in Community so that God can care for us, speak to us, stretch us and grow us into being more like Jesus.

I. Committed to Community

Let me just spend a few moments putting some scripture around what we believe concerning why we need to be committed to community. For while we all know that the Church isn't just a building, we sometimes forget that a church is a community of friends who follow Jesus together. And while you can meet God when you are alone in the Word or in the Woods, His number one plan is that as we are to be in relationship with each other so that the fullness of Jesus can be experienced in greater depth. In Acts 2, as the early church began to figure out how to do faith, we read that they connected in three ways. Acts 2:42, 46-47, *“They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.”* They met each other at the temple (church), they meet in their homes and they met each other around

tables. Why? Because there is the need to gather as a larger group so you can look around the room and see (as we saw last week) that God is powerful enough to be at work in the lives of many people at the same time (and that gives us hope) and then together we turn our faces Heavenward and say, "You are Holy, You are mighty, You have proved You are loving - now together we ask you to touch us again Lord.

Then they met in homes together because as Matt Chandler says, "*Sanctification always takes place within the confines of deep relationships.*" For it is so easy to believe that our ideas, our way of doing things is always right and at times a friend needs to say, "*I heard you speaking to your wife or I heard you putting you son down again and as friend, a brother, I need to point this out to you.*" And because they are a friend you stop and look at your actions and you say, "*I just got into the habit of it ... next time you see me do that .. can you mention it again because with God help and your help I want to do better than I have been doing.*" And a home gets happier because of you did life with a friend who had faith.

Then they met around tables together for relationships can go to a whole new level over a meal. We all need times to laugh together around a good meal. Often in the process we grow what some call our 2 am buddies, the kind of person, who when the problems hit at 2 in the morning, we will be the kind of friend that will be there no matter what the time or situation. And we will all need one of those at some time in our lives. There is the New Testament pattern meeting in Church as a larger group to worship and be inspired meeting in homes as a smaller group to wrestle through life together and around meals because true friendship needs food, fun, laughter and time in which to grow.

But if we are honest, it is easy because of kids, jobs, the busyness of life to let some or all of those gatherings slide out of our lives. That is why Paul wrote the following in Hebrews 10:24, 25, "*And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.*" Notice that Paul is saying if you forsake gathering together, growing faith filled friends, walking in community; you are living outside of how I designed you to live. But, he is also saying we need to be in church and that small group meeting around tables not just for our own sake but "*to spur one another on toward love and good deeds.*" Our involvement can have a profound impact on others and when we miss, others will suffer. The issue isn't just one of attendance; the issue is one of neglecting our soul and the soul care of others. Back to the text, "*Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing.*" Isn't it interesting that he used the word habit here. But, we all know that when we miss a Sunday or two, our whole week seems off but is we miss 4 or 5 Sundays in a row it doesn't take long until a 'habit' forms and that feels natural to us. And it isn't long until our conscience voice is muted by the sound of the power boat or trailer noises. And the result is "*we are NOT encouraging one another as we see the Day approaching.*" The word 'encourage' means to pour courage into someone else. That means in the service, in the small group and around the table, you - by your presence, heart and by sharing the things God whispers (knowingly/unknowingly) into the heart of others are pouring courage into them. That is why one author read said real community is hanging out with a spiritual purpose. C.S. Lewis says, "*Christ works in all kinds of ways but above all, He works on us through community.*"

How does it work? Turn to II Corinthians 1:3, 4, *“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God.”* The Bad News is tragedy and trouble happen in life; the Good News is that if you are a member of the body of Christ you don’t have to go through it alone. But even more than that, God will take that with which He comforted you and as you share it with someone else, they will, in turn, be comforted.

I Thessalonians 4:16, 17, *“For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.”* Isn’t that great stuff? Now look at verse 18, *“Therefore encourage each other with these words.”* God is saying that He has given us a sneak peak about His return so we can encourage each other with it. Those times of encouraging others will never happen unless we are connected in community and unless we have developed the kind of friendships where we know others well enough to know when they need our care or a word from the Lord.

I believe we have often messed this up as churches. We have this idea that if we come on a Sunday our experience with God and the brilliance of the sermon will be such that it will be enough to carry us through whatever will come our way in life. Occasionally, I will have someone come up to me and say, *“Dave, last Sunday was powerful.”* And while that thrills my soul, I am deathly afraid to ask, *“What part of the sermon did you find the most impactful?”* And I see this panicked look come across their face, respond with *“That thing about Jesus.”* Don’t get me wrong, I am not only surprised and honoured that you come when I preach but I am overwhelmed by how God can use parts of a sermon to change our life direction (mine included). But I am also not naïve enough to miss the fact that while sermon may feed our soul and be a whisper from God for us, that unless our faith is lived out in community, reinforced as we gather with others in small groups or with a friend digging in the Word together around the table that we will not reach anywhere near the potential God has for us or the joy He wants us to experience. Don’t miss that the pattern of scripture is a simple one. We are to be connected in community, having places in our lives where we can join the larger gathering so we can see that God is at work in many ways with many people beyond on own life. We are also to be connected in smaller groups where people can ask the hard questions and comfort us with things God has been comforting them with, pray about important things together and we are to be connected with times around tables (in restaurants, homes, picnic tables, BBQ’s and places where friends can share the joy of the Lord and life together.

II. Cultivating Community

In an article entitled *“Lessons from A Tavern,”* Chuck Swindoll writes, *“An old Marine Corps buddy of mine, to my pleasant surprise, came to know Christ after he was discharged. I say surprise because he cursed loudly, fought hard, chased women, drank heavily, loved war and weapons and hated chapel services. A number of months ago, I ran into this fellow, and after we’d talked awhile, he put his hand on my shoulder and said, ‘You know, Chuck, the only thing I still miss is that old fellowship I used to have*

with all the guys down at the tavern. I remember how we used to sit around and let our hair down. I can't find anything like that for Christians. I no longer have a place to admit my faults and talk about my battles — where somebody won't preach at me and frown and quote me a verse.' It wasn't one month later that in my reading I came across this profound paragraph: 'The neighbourhood bar is possibly the best counterfeit that there is to the fellowship Christ wants to give his church. It's an imitation, dispensing liquor instead of grace, escape rather than reality — but it is a permissive, accepting, and inclusive fellowship. It is unshockable. You can tell people secrets, and they usually don't tell others or even want to. The bar flourishes not because most people are alcoholics, but because God has put into the human heart the desire to know and be known, to love and be loved, and so many seek a counterfeit at the price of a few beers. With all my heart,' this writer concludes, 'I believe that Christ wants his church to be unshockable, a fellowship where people can come in and say, "I'm sunk, I'm beat, I've had it." Alcoholics Anonymous has this quality — our churches too often miss it.'"

Can I say this graciously that at the end of the day it isn't theology that matters as much as the community you belong to. I know that is over stated; but often we as Baptists have been so theologically correct that we have missed that the church in the New Testament thrived because they walked with Jesus and the walked hand in hand with each other. God has created us to have a 3D (God/Us and others) relationship with Him and a 2D (God and us) relationship won't cut it as we walk through all life has to throw at us or at our friends at Brentview. Fellowship can no longer be defined as attending a service or potluck together. We need to *Intentionally* cultivate community in our lives and in this church. I say that, because, as the church has grown it get easier to get lost in the crowd and not develop the friendships we need and God expects. We all need the kind of friendships where someone will ask us, "*How does it go with your soul?*" I say that because I have found in my life that same tug in my soul growing louder.

Just as we end, may I make just 4 simple suggestions as you wrestle with not only what your soul needs but also what we see as the pattern from scripture along side of the busy lives. In order to make this happen it will take thought, prayer and the juggling of our schedules:

1. Each Sunday look around for those you can bless. Hebrews 10:24,2, Philippians 2:4. 5 handshakes – 3 you know/ 2 you don't. Look for those you can encourage and bless. For we (you) are the church.
2. Go on a journey to find who should be those soul (2:00 am) friends. Try to go out with another person or couple at least once or twice to see if you click and if you feel the Lord saying that they will be that friend who will stick closer than a brother. I know of a guy who meets every couple weeks for wings and coke to talk deep stuff together and to encourage each others souls.
3. Seriously consider becoming a part of a Small Group. I know of a group of 7 young moms who meet regularly for prayer. I am part of a group that meets every second week. Others meet every week; feel free craft a group around creative things.

How do you get involved in a Small Group at Brentview?

- a. Check the Brentview website at www.brentviewbaptist.com. Go to the "Ministries" Menu and click on Small Group Ministries. Fill in the form and hand it in to the office through the offering or Info Desk. If you don't hear from us within a couple weeks, please bug us again.
- b. Email the Pastor for your age group. If you're in the Boomer age, email me and I will direct you.
- c. Start your own group (let us know about it and if we can help). Honestly, we need more people to step up, use your gifts and help grow this environment of 'unshockable fellowships' in this place.
4. Newcomers Lunch is on Sunday, October 17 at 12:30 pm. Come and join us to learn more about Brentview.

I remember the week we lost our second baby. Although it was my turn to preach, I received a phone call from our only female Elder who said that the Elders would take care of the sermon. I sat there that Sunday morning, sad and hollow but the 2 ladies who spoke that day were used by God to breathe life back into me and others in the congregation wrapped me in their care. That is only one of many times I have said that I am so thankful for the how God connects us in community.

We are a people among whom God is moving. As we read the cards this morning we know that people are experiencing God and are seeing their lives transformed. And I believe that God is calling us to, together, work on being increasingly connected in community. This will only happen as we, as individuals, do our part to make community happen. Will you help us to increasingly become a place where the community is sweet and people are cared for? Won't you be my neighbour and a neighbour to others?

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