

If you have your Bibles, turn to Ecclesiastes 4. There's a lot in this chapter, but I think we've got to hear it tonight and we've got to wrestle through some of this stuff. And we've got to be honest about some of this stuff or we're going to be in trouble. Solomon has got some very big problems with God in chapter 4. He's got some big problems with God, and he's just going to let it be known. And then, he's going to talk about these problems he has with God as if they're the same problems that all of us have with God. And I think he might be onto something here. And then he's going to give not an answer to those problems, but how we survive those problems. And so, that's kind of out of the gate what we're going to be doing tonight, but let me show you what I mean out of Ecclesiastes 4, starting in verse 1. "Again I saw all the oppressions that are done under the sun. And behold, the tears of the oppressed, and they had no one to comfort them! On the side of their oppressors there was power," or there was a way for the oppressed not to be oppressed, "and there was no one to comfort them. And I thought the dead who are already dead more fortunate than the living who are still alive. But better than both is he who has not yet been and has not seen the evil deeds that are done under the sun."

I was a magazine article out of a magazine for pastors. It's called "PQ," it's like "GQ" but for pastors, I just made that up. And the article was about a pastor in Michigan who did a thing in his community called "Doubt Night." And what he did is, they sent out hundreds and hundreds of fliers and they promoted this thing through television. Basically, he said, "Any question you have about God, anything you want to talk about, you come, I'll stand on stage, we'll put out mics and we'll just answer any of your questions." They were kind of trying to engage the culture and engage the people out there. And they had been doing this series in their church on forgiveness and what it took to forgive as well as to let go of bitterness and hate and all those things and the necessity to forgive in order to be forgiven. And they were just kind of doing a series on that. And they open up the mics and the pastor was standing at the front of the stage, and this 20 something woman walked up to the microphone and here's the first question of the evening, "I am afraid..." and she began to weep, "...that God will be unable to forgive me because I cannot forgive the man that raped me when I was fifteen." And so immediately, I'm reading this and I'm going, "Okay, what's his answer? What's his answer? What's his answer?" I mean, I'm a pastor and I don't know how I would answer that. How would you answer that question? And it never says how he answered the question. So I just thought, "I wonder what staff meeting went like on Tuesday?" "Whose idea was that? Put me up on stage like that. Are you kidding me? You, Johnson, you're gone. Get your stuff out, Mr. Doubt Night and engage the community. What a horrible idea." I started thinking through my three and a half years as a pastor. You know, traveling and preaching, it's really a cool gig because no one ever e-mails you with gravity. But pastoring, it's a different game, man. Like, I think about the reality of things like suffering and oppression and pain and hurt and betrayal. For a lot of us, those are just words. But for some of us, they're life.

I got to thinking about e-mails and stories and how many questions there are about why God operates like He does and how things work and why they work that way. And not any particular story, but how many times I've been e-mailed, "Hey, my husband's leaving and I've got three small babies," or "I've been sick for a long time how and why or how in the world does this glorify God?" Or, "I've got this sin in me that no matter what I do or how hard I work at it, it haunts me. I hate that I struggle with this." And I started thinking about Solomon's frustration here with oppression and pain and the reality of them. And then, he's going to say here, and the thing I like so much about this is, he says, "And those with power, sometimes they can't help either." Like, I think about church and how often I've heard pastors make promises that they just cannot keep. I don't know how much you've been here or not, I mock a lot of stuff, it's probably because I didn't get hugged enough as a kid or something. I don't know why I do it, alright. You know, I've reconciled with my father, I'm okay

with who I am, but I still have this tendency to mock stuff. I'm still seeing Jerry Meade every now and then. One of the things I mock often is Christian pop-culture because I can't cuss at it because I'm a pastor, so I can just mock it. One of the things that I always kind of address, and I always tell you to be worried about "four steps to this" and "seven steps for that," because it can do an unbelievable amount of damage. Like, if you've never heard the sermon, "Four Ways to Remove Doubt." I mean, what happens when you do the four things and doubt's still there? What if, "Okay you wake up early in the morning, you read your Bible, you need to pray more, you need to go to church more often and tithe. And if you do those four things, Jesus will show up in the flesh and hug you. Go now. Go now into the night, and tomorrow you'll have your opportunity." And you do those four things and nobody ever knocks on your door and Jesus never shows up. If anything, you do the four things and it's status quo, right? Then you either feel like you were lied to or probably the way most of us feel is that we're just broken. Because, you know, you go to church and everybody looks alright. You know, everybody's singing songs, "Oh, What a Joy..." and the girl next to you is crying and then the guy gets up and starts preaching and everybody's nodding their head, "yeah" and taking notes, and it feels like you're the only one that's like missing the deeper parts of it. And then, there are all these preachers out there that will tell you, "Oh, what you need is the baptism...you get the baptism...oh no, if you're a Calvinist, you just get the five points down and you're in." You've got all these little segments of Christianity going, "No, you want fullness? This is what it is." "No, you want fullness? This is what it is." "No, you want fullness? This is what it is." It's a bunch of guys promising trash they could never deliver. And Solomon goes, "Sometimes there ain't no easy answer. And I've looked around and I've noticed that there is hurt and there is pain and there is sorrow." And then, he doesn't give us any answer. He just moves on to the next thing he's seen.

Glad you're here? Good, good. Let's keep going. I promise you, he's going to help us. We just have to survive the first five verses. This is what he's going to say he sees next, and I got to giggling because it's so absolutely true about all of us. So, the first problem he has with God, the first problem he has with life here is that there's all this pain and there's all this hurt and there's all this oppression. And then look at what he sees next. He's going to say, "Not only does this exist, but everybody's broken." And this is what he's going to say about everybody, "Then I saw that all toil and all skill in work come from a man's envy of his neighbor." Okay, here's what he's saying. He's saying that the clothes you're wearing right now, you're not wearing because you needed them, but because you wanted your neighbor see you in them. You don't purchase a car because you need a car; you purchase a car because you want to be seen in that vehicle." He's saying, "At the center of all of our hearts, we want to be noticed and we want to be central and we want to be the focus of attention, and it is the driving force in all of us." And I got to laughing because it's absolutely true. You know how I know? Because the majority of you paid between \$2-4 for a cup of coffee in a white and green cup this week, and that's madness. But why do we do it? Because there's something about that cup that screams, "I get it." I mean, keep going down the line. We work out. That becomes such a big part of our lives, not because we just want to be fit but because we can't wait to get to the pool and be seen. It's the truth. It's why we have pop- culture, why we can define things as "popular." All that means is that we can have things that other people want. And Solomon goes, "How can you handle life on Earth when there's pain and oppression and everything seems to be falling apart and then no one really has genuine concern for anyone? Everybody just wants to stand at the center of their own universe."

And so, he says we tend to two things when you start noticing this. Look at the two things he says happens. Verse 5, "The fool folds his hands and eats his own flesh. Better is a handful of quietness than two hands full of toil and a striving after wind." Here's the first thing that happens. One of the things that happens is, people see all this and they go, "There can be no God." They just fold their arms and go, "There can be no God." and then they just devour themselves because there's no one else to wrestle with, no one else to fight with, no one else to be frustrated with. They just fold their arms and go, "There's no real answer." That's the first way. Most people don't take that route; most people take the next route. Look at what comes next. "Again, I saw vanity under the sun: one person who has no other, either son or brother, yet there is no end to all his toil, and his eyes are never satisfied with riches, so that he never asks, "For whom am I toiling and depriving myself of pleasure?" This also is vanity and an unhappy business." So, we see hurt and pain and sorrow,

you've got all these things that can go wrong, all these things that can happen to wound our soul. On the other side, the majority of people who will wound you, will hurt you, will use you, this is the state of the world. And so, Solomon says, "Some of us fold our arms and say, 'Forget it,' others of us bury ourselves in our work or our ministry or our jobs or whatever we can busy ourselves in so we don't have to address our own fallen heart and the brokenness of the world. We put on blinders." But Solomon is going to say, "God has another plan for surviving this. God has another plan that beats folding our arms and saying, 'Forget it,' or burying ourself in work or play or whatever we have to bury ourselves in to get our minds of the brokenness of the world."

Look at what he says next. This is a pretty popular passage if you're "church folk" in here. It's been on several coffee cups. It hadn't made bumper sticker yet, but it's still early. It's only a couple thousand years old. So, look at verse 9. "Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow. But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up! Again, if two lie together, they keep warm, but how can one keep warm alone?" Now, I'll address this here in a minute for you single guys who are highlighting that verse now. I'll get to it and explain if more fully, so that you're like this week, "No baby, Ecclesiastes 4 says..." Verse 12, "And though a man might prevail against one who is alone, two will withstand him--a threefold cord is not quickly broken." So, the world's broken, and anyone who says differently is probably in the nursery right now. Like my son, nine months old, sorrow to him is that I didn't get the bottle out of the microwave fast enough. That's sorrow. Sorrow to him is like, "I had to wait 22 seconds. I could have died." I mean, that's sorrow to my son. But the majority of us have tasted it or been close enough to it to feel it. And then, who hadn't been wounded by somebody else, some self-absorbed, self-seeking person? Who hadn't been wounded? I think people who would argue against these two aren't in here. I think you'd even be hard pressed to find them. Because life, it throws these things at us. And Solomon goes, "In the middle of all of this, we need each other. We desperately and in a very deep way, with Christ in the center, need each other." And he starts unpacking why that is. He goes, "Because listen, when there's two of you, there's better return on your work."

Lauren and I, we're moving down to this area, that's what we've been doing all week, which has been fun, being sick. We moved into this house up in Denton, and we didn't have any kids. I mean, when I got married to Lauren, I had a box spring mattress and Jordan that was kind of the bed frame and then a fork. That's what I owned. I didn't own anything else than that. I could move myself in around seven minutes. But when you buy a house and start having kids, all of a sudden, there's just junk everywhere. And some of it, as we cleaned up the house, was very confusing to me. Like, we had like three or four swing sets. We only have two kids. I don't know where they came from. You know those little tubs that you wash infants in? We had like seven of them. I'm like, "What did we do, rinse him and wash him off and then move him? I mean, how did we get all this stuff?" So, we packed it all up and got it all ready to go, and then I had pretty much the staff come help me move, because I'm the boss here and I had them come over. No, I asked them...forcefully. And eight of them showed up, and we moved. I rented just a nasty U-haul, a 1972, five speed, the kind with the reverse up here versus back here, and we loaded the thing up. And here's the thing, we're kind of rookies when it comes to moving, as in doing it in August in Texas, and we're loading this thing up. And let me tell you, it's a whipping, but those nine guys showing up divided that whipping by nine. And they made what would have been a exhausting, miserable day turn out to be something that lasted a few hours and even had some laughter in it. Like, when we got done moving us down here, I took them all down to this restaurant, and I just wanted to buy them lunch. And were eating and we just started talking, and there's a group of guys on staff that like to hunt. I'm not one of them; it doesn't make sense to me. Like, I don't think it's fair. I just want to be honest. I think if you want to hunt, you should take off all your clothes, run the animal down and kill it with your hands or your teeth. Maybe I'm just not manly, maybe I just don't get it. But let me get this straight, you feed it all year long and then when it shows up to eat, you pop it? Okay, so I don't get the whole hunting thing. Now, don't get me wrong, brother likes his steak, but I'm not going to kill a cow to get it. And so, we're talking about this and the guys who do hunt on staff were talking about wounding an animal and having to track it down and then finish it off. And Bleecker's down at the end of the table almost in tears. And so, Jeremy Pace was telling us

about this time he shot this one in the shoulder and he had to track it down, chase it for a mile or two, and then finish it off up close, and Bleecker goes, "Man, you guys ever cry?" He's like, "I'm joking, kind of. But..." He was giving the animals names and stuff. It was weird, alright. So we got to giggling, and something that was as miserable as moving in Texas in August, all of a sudden, it wasn't as hard to survive and there was actually some joy in it. And listen, I know we're being stupid here and we're talking about me moving, but in reality, have you ever tried to heal? I mean, have you ever tried to heal the deep places? You know that part of you that misfires, that part of you that keeps leading you back to the same crap over and over and over again? Have you ever tried to get into that and try to find some healing in that? It is a weighty, at times unbearable, journey. And praise Christ for people who come along side of you.

And he also says, on top of that, "If we do life together, we'll be picked up at the point of falling." Here's something I want you to think about, and I'll just be kind of quiet. I'll say it, and I'm going to let you think about it while I take a sip of water, and then we'll address it. This is going to be deep, so follow me here. The thing about your blind spots is you can't see them. Selah. Think on that for a minute while I drink here. If you can't see where you're weak and prone to fall, how are you going to keep yourself from falling? Once again, praise God for men and women who will know you in such a way that they're not afraid to walk up to you and go, "I'm nervous for you, man. I see this thing here. I'm nervous for you." I find that few people ever have friends like that, the kind that love you enough to confront you.

And then, he talks about this keeping each other warm thing. This one's going to be hard. Let me try to explain this. In other parts of the world, there's this thing called "winter." Trust me here, because I know some of you are like, "Come on, it's like the unicorn or the Oompa Loompa." But trust me here. In other parts of the world, there's this thing called "winter," and what happens here is that things go from being hot to mild to cold. And cold is what happens when you open your freezer or ice, think ice, think the air is like ice. Are you with me? And winter is marked by death and hibernation and the cold. Like, if you've ever lived in places with a real winter. Like my family and I lived in Michigan for two years, way north in Michigan, in Sault St. Marie. And literally, for three-four months of the time, you're stuck inside. And man, that place games with you. It does. It plays games with you. I mean, bless my mom's heart, little nine-year-old Matt Chandler stuck inside for four months. Catching stuff on fire. It was a tough deal for her. The text says, "When winter comes for you, and it is coming for you, when it gets here, no matter how cold, being truly known by others will keep you warm. And then, the last thing he said is that, "If there's two of us, we'll be able to stand if somebody tries to attack us." He basically says there's safety in numbers.

Okay, so I have this question. I mean, I think we all know this. I think the majority of us got some church background. I mean, I think we know this. I don't think this is new stuff here. I don't think I'm unpacking anything for you today that a lot of you are hearing for the first time. I think the majority of people know this. We've been called, as believers in Jesus, to do life together, to walk deeply together, to know one another, to confess our sins to one another, challenge one another, grow one another. I mean, we've been called to do this. The question that I had as I read through this is not, "Is this a reality that has been taught?" Because I think it's a reality that's been beat to death. The question is, "Why do so few of us have relationships like this?" We all know we should. But why do so many of us not have these kind of relationships? Why do so many of us find it so difficult to walk in this kind of deep, spiritual, life giving fellowship with other believers? Why is it so difficult? Well, he's already answered it. He's already given you at least four things in this text that absolutely derail any chance you have for deep, real, meaningful relationship.

Let me show them to you. Look back at verse 4. Verse 4 is one of the enemies of real community and the kind of community that would sustain when sorrow, hurt and pain come along. "Then I saw that all toil and all skill in work come from a man's envy of his neighbor." Okay, let me ask a question, and I know the answer to it. The answer is "No way, Matt." But here's the question: have you ever found yourself at some quiet, deep place celebrating someone else's failures? No? I haven't either. I've heard, I've read some stuff that some people at times... Like, have you ever had that guy in your

crew, that person that's kind of around you that kind of stumbled and fell and there was this weird part of you that was okay with that? How about this, has someone ever gotten on your nerves because of the good that's happened to him?

"I don't like him, man."

"Why not?"

"I don't know, he's just all pretty and good, and I just don't know. I just don't like him."

Jealousy will always derail your chances of deep relationship, because if you believe you deserve what God chooses to give others, then the thing Christ calls us to...and here's what he calls us to. Like, Christ calls you and me to know each other in such a way that when good things happen to you, I rejoice. Like, when good things happen to you, that gives me life, that encourages me. And when bad things things happen to you, I grieve with you. Can you see that the antithesis of that, the exact opposite of that would be for me to rejoice in your grief and for me to find sorrow in your good? If you're not willing to address the wickedness of your own heart, community will always derail on you. It won't happen. You'll only be able to get to a certain level because you'll have to pretend, you'll have to pretend that you're happy that they got the promotion. You'll have to pretend that you're wounded that they finally blew it. And once that gets in the game, you're wearing the mask, you're pretending. And pretending is this really devastating thing that can happen to God's people. It makes us odd, peculiar and weird. It makes us think that we have to have an answer for everything. Jealousy, it will kill you.

But here's the other thing. Here's that will get you. The second thing that will get you is in the next verse. Look at it, "The fool folds his hands and eats his own flesh." Jealousy absolutely will kill community. Let me tell you another thing that will. Laziness. I asked permission from my wife (and if you think that sounds weird, then you're not married) to share this, but I had this real idealistic idea of what marriage would be and what what it is. And like, my idea was that I could be enough for my wife. Like, I could romance her enough, I could care for her enough, I could say the right things, I could be understanding and even if I didn't understand, I could fake it, and I could be attentive and gentle and creative, and I could do all of that and be enough for her. And that's why for the first two years of my marriage, I felt so helpless at times. Because I'm not enough. I'm not. No matter how creative I get or how sweet I can be or how gentle I am or how encouraging I am or whatever, it doesn't matter. I'm not enough, because the hole in her is eternal and I am not. And I had to watch her wrestle through some things and be completely powerless to help her at all. Why am I telling you this? Here's why. Intimacy requires work. Do I have any married people in here? Intimacy requires effort. No one, I mean no one stumbles into it. No one trips over the Bible and "Oh, look at this, I'm known and fully know." It has to be worked for, fought for, wrestled over and paid for. Lazy people know true community. Can I tell you why? Because they're life sucking human beings that require other people to feed them. And eventually, people will get tired of feeding them and they will leave them all by themselves to feed off their own feces until they die. And that's what Solomon just said, that the man who folds up his arms ends up eating himself. So, let me chat with you, if you're a college student in particular. The thing about college students is that because of the place they are, they're always looking to the future, "When I graduate...when I meet Mr. Right...when I get out...when I get a job..." and you're so future minded that you never plug in, you never take the steps to get connected and you never start this battle.

Which leads us into the next great enemy of real genuine community. Look at this next one in verse 6, "Better is a handful of quietness than two hands full of toil and a striving after wind." He's saying this. So jealousy, it can definitely cost us community. And laziness, it can definitely cost us genuine community. You know what else can? Dissatisfaction. Here's why. If you're always in the future, you're never where you are. So, if your head is always, "When this happens... when I get this done...when this occurs...when this stops...when this quits being an issue...when this starts...I can't wait

until...when I graduate...when I finally get that promotion...when I..." If your head is always in tomorrow, you never are where you are. And so, you're missing out on all the beautiful realities of today at the expense of tomorrow. And the problem with tomorrow is it's always there. So, you'll always be dreaming about could be instead of living in what you are in. And you miss these really subtle beauties. And people who are immensely dissatisfied, suck the life out of other people because they look around and try to find the reason that they're dissatisfied, and they tend to place a lot of blame on other people for their dissatisfaction. It's pretty devastating, huh?

I've got a son, and I'm pretty pumped about it. Being the daddy of a daughter is kind of his this really cool...I can't explain it to you, but at some point, I want to wrestle and quit dressing up like a fairy. And I just need some blue. I need to step away from the pink. I need some blue in my life, alright. And I can't wait for him to get a little older. I can't wait to throw the rock with him. We've got a little basketball thing at my house. And I'll just sit down out there while we dribble and bounce it off of him a couple times. I just can't wait for that. And listen, if he doesn't want to do that, that's great. We'll paint or sew or whatever, man. I don't care. I'm not that guy that's like, "You gotta do it. Eye of the tiger. We gotta do push ups!" I don't care. I he wants to act, let's act. If you want to quilt, we'll quilt a mean, manly blanket, alright. We'll do it. Let's go. But I'm ready for that. I'm excited about that.

But you know what, there's all these really beautiful things right now, nine months old. There's all these really beautiful things right now. There are these smells that are going to go away. And I'm not talking about bad smells. There are these really cool baby smells. Like when you get them out of the bath, they have this distinct smell. And with my first, we were always like, "I can't wait 'til she walks...I can't wait 'til she crawls...I can't wait 'til she talks." We have never done that with Reid. We're just kind of going, "Oh, slow down. Slow down." And we're just trying to drink deeply right now. I hurt so badly for some of you who are so stuck on some better day tomorrow that you don't realize that Jesus has been unbelievably good to you now, even if you're in the middle of sorrow. Dissatisfaction can be a killer.

And then, the fourth great enemy of community according to Solomon is in verse 7. "Again, I saw vanity under the sun: one person who has no other, either son or brother, yet there is no end to all his toil, and his eyes are never satisfied with riches, so that he never asks, "For whom am I toiling and depriving myself of pleasure?" Do you want to know what the fourth enemy is? Work. Work is the enemy of genuine community. I know a lot of you are like, "No problem, man." A lady at the church sent me an article from the Wall Street Journal that was in the paper a couple of week ago. The article was these guys from the Wall Street Journal trying to figure out who the happiest people in America are. And their conclusion was that the people who are happiest are not people who have spent time, money and energy acquiring things because that thing loses its luster after a while. And this goes back to envy being the thing that drives us. Like, when you buy the 2005 model and everybody's like, "Oooh, that's the 2005 model. Oh, seat warmers." Then by the end of 2005, the 2008 models come out. I don't fully understand the car system, how it works. I just know that there's years out that haven't been yet. So, it's this kind of weird, omnipresent car thing, but the 2008 comes out. And as soon as the 2008 comes out, some guy in the neighborhood's got it. And the neighbors don't care about your car because the new car's got an ejection seat and it runs off of garbage, and your car is obsolete. And so now, all of a sudden, all the joy you were getting out of being envied has disappeared because someone else has taken the throne of the envy. And now, you're obsolete, which forces you to work harder to get another car. Anyway, they're saying that the happiest people aren't people who spend money on acquiring, but people who spent their time, energy and money on increasing their relational capacity. They say that the people who are happiest aren't the people who buy the real nice car, but the people who buy less of a car than they need and then take the rest of their money and go to Europe with friends. Okay, that doesn't resonate. Let's try this one...and go to San Antonio with some buddies. Is that more realistic for us in this one? That's who's happiest. You know who's happiest? Are you following me, because something miraculous just happened. The Wall Street Journal just agreed with Scripture. Who's happiest? Those who don't chase after the wind.

Guys, can I tell you something? I was a college minister for ten years. Let me tell you a little something I learned. I've never met a little girl who hated her dad because she was driving a 1972 Datsun Maxima that was primer on the left side and backfired in school zones. I've never met her. She's never come into my office and said, "My dad hates me." "Why?" "Did you see the car he got me? That's a Datsun, man. They don't even make Datsuns anymore." I've never met her. But just to be really honest and put some gravity back into tonight, I've met way too many girls who had \$40,000 cars and a really skewed understanding of their own value. So for future daddies, she doesn't need designer jeans, not as much as she needs to be rejoiced in. Maybe working 90 hours a week to get your family trinkets can backfire on you. And maybe you've got no choice. I don't know. I mean, I'm a workaholic myself. So is the majority of my staff. It's one of the things I value. But I think we had better be wrestling with this. So, these are the big enemies of community.

So, what do we do? I mean, these are all ambiguous things. So, what do we do to address these? What do we do to overcome this? How do we get these kind of relationships? Let's try to talk about where we find ourselves as a church. I want you to try to get this in your head with me tonight. A little over three and a half years ago, there were 168 people here. Last weekend on campus, counting children, there were 3,900 people here across five (soon to be six) services. And so, what happens when that kind of thing occurs, is that there's this deep longing to belong and to connect and to find your rhythm in and walk in this stuff, but it feels monumental. And so, what ends up happening is you sit in here week after week, and you kind of see community happening in these pockets and you want it, but you don't know how to get into it. You're like, "Somebody teach me the secret handshake or the code or the cloak I'm supposed to wear to get into this thing because I so desperately want in, but I'm finding it very hard to get in." And the truth is we don't have any of that. I think a handshake would be cool. You think one up, e-mail it to me and we'll vote on it, alright. So, what do you do in a place like the Village that's blowing and going. I mean, you can come here every week and not see the same people. How do you do this? How do you have this kind of community that Solomon's talking about, the kind that can save you from falling into sin, the kind that can sustain you when winter gets here? How do you have those kind of relationships in a place like this? Well, let me be really clear on what I'm about to say. All I can do tonight is point you in a direction. There's nothing I can say to you tonight that can bring this about by Thursday. There's no magic spell I can cast, no series of actions that, if you follow them, this will occur quickly. All I can do, and trust me it's very frustrating for me, is point in a direction and say, "If you'll start walking this way, it will happen one day."

"Well, how far is it down that road?"

"Well, I don't know. For some of you, two weeks. For others of you, a decade." "How do I know which one I am?"

"We'll find out in a decade."

So, here's what we did. We just got together and we were like, "How do we do this? I mean, we've just got so many people here who are just so burning and wanting to be connected, but they just don't know how to do it. So, what can we do?" Let's say this is your first time here tonight. Let's say you're a guest here, and everything we've done tonight has been offensive to you. Like, Bleecker offended you, the music was too loud, you think I play around too much, it's just not the place for you. Awesome! Because you know now that we're not the place that you should plug into, and that's great news tonight. I'm not lamenting. I'm going praise Christ. Some other church in this area is going to get a great young man/great young woman. I mean, there's one kingdom, man. It just works itself out in all these different locations. Praise Christ. Go, find your home and get there. But for some of you, this thing's resonating. Like, these parts of your heart that haven't been breathing or beating, all of a sudden, they're breathing and they're like, "What's that smell?" And for whatever reason, the Spirit's resonating in your heart and you're going, "What do they believe? How does this work?" Then, on your way out tonight, there's this little black table on the other side of that wall. Swing to it and go, "Hey, I'm a guest tonight" or "I've only been here a couple of times." And they'll just give you some junk. They'll

give you a little magazine that we do that you can read through and find out what we believe theologically, how we're wired, why we don't do certain things, why we do certain things. I think they'll give you a CD of one of my sermons that's just me trying to go, "This is what I want us to be so badly." They'll just give you some information. You can go and you can pray and you can look over it and read over it and go, "Okay, this is the place." Or you can go, "Uh uh." And then you can go look some other places. That's awesome.

Or maybe tonight, and this is who I wanted to address more than anybody else. Maybe you've been coming here for a while and you just resonate with this place and you love this place so much, but you find it impossible to be connected here. And you want these kind of relationships, but you just don't know how to get them and you don't know what to do. Well, you can do two things tonight. One is my preference. In your bulletin, we put this little piece of paper that says "Thirsting for Community." And here's your options with this. You can fill it out and dump it in what we call the "joy boxes" here, and somebody will call you or send you something. Or, I don't know if you know this or not because lay people do the announcements here. And whether you know it or not, you're kind of a terrifying crowd. Now, I'm not scared of you, but sometimes people who get up here don't get in front of crowds a lot. So they give the announcements real quickly or something. Or they look like they're about to blackout and "um" a lot. And you know, they kind of freak out a little bit. I don't know if you know this, but directly across the parking lot there's this illegal portable building that we own, don't tell the city. And after every service, that place opens up and it's called "Servant Central." And it's staffed with people from the church who can tell you everything that's going on here and these places you can connect, whether it's home groups or women's Bible studies or international missions or local missions. There's all these places you can connect with, other people here to try to sync up with. I mean, it just doesn't have to be a Bible study. I mean, there's thousands of day laborers down on Business 121, and we go out there twice a week and cook them burritos and give them out for free and you can work on your Spanish. And it's this really beautiful place where we just give back. And there's just all these places to connect, and the people at Servant Central can tell you about them. They can answer your questions. Honestly, they know this place better than I do. I can't how often someone will ask me, "When does that group meet?" And I'm like, "We have that group? That is awesome! I don't know. Let's ask Paul Matthies, alright. I don't know when they meet. Let's find out."

Okay, maybe going over to a small (illegal) building is more than you can do. Maybe that's more than you can do tonight. Well, in the foyer, there's another table set up with all our home group information. Maybe you just grab one of those sheets and roll the dice and show up at a group this week. On the other side, I think there's a table of women's Bible studies that are rolling out in the fall. Honestly, I think there's like 15-16 of them, different Bible studies at different times at different locations all over the metroplex. Maybe you sign up for one of those. We've got Celebrate Recovery on Thursday night. We partner with other business, other churches where you can serve, you can get connected, where you can meet other believers in Christ. I wish I could stand up here for those of you who are going, "Man, I've done this before, and I've been hurt, Chandler." I wish I could stand up here and tell you that you won't get hurt, but I can't promise you that. You know, never underestimate the dumbness of large groups of people. I can't guarantee your safety. I can tell you that we're not afraid here to handle public sin, and nobody keeps a voice long around here who would use it to beat up people. And I will tell you from my own mouth that this is a place where it's okay for you to not be okay. But there's 4,000 people here, I know 250-300 of them. But I can tell you, the reward far outweighs the risk.

And you know the worst part about being a preacher? It's not the constant e-mails you get of, "I find you offensive." It's not that constant stuff. I always want to paste it and send it back to them, "I find you offensive." You want to know the most difficult part? Because for me, coming from where I've been, to where I find my heart and my marriage and my family and my soul, although we have had a lot of valleys and a lot of tears, all I can do is point you down the road, knowing very well that the majority of you will do nothing. But in 1 Peter, the apostle Peter says, "I do what I do for those

who will hear." And so, to those who will hear tonight, take a step. I hadn't blown smoke at you, I hadn't said it was easy or quick, I just said it was worth it.

Let me pray for us, "Father, I thank You for these men and women and the chance to come together and open up Your Bible and wonder about You. And I know, for some of us, this resonates more for some of us than others because the things that Solomon experienced and felt, they're not just ideas to us, but they're our life experience. And we do no sorrow, we do no sin that haunts us. And we do know frustration, we do know being wounded by people, we know these things, and we know them deeply. And so, I pray that You would help us take a step. I just so worry about us. So many of us think that this is church, when in reality this is a service, this is not church. Church is what happens when mutual believers in Christ do life together. And I think there's just such confusion over that, that there are people who think that attending a service means that they're a part of church. And it's just not the reality of Scripture nor what You call us to be. And so, I'm asking for Your help, Father. Help us us walk together. Help us do life together because the reality is that some of us are in the middle of winter right now, and for others of us, it's fall and winter's coming quick. I pray that You would give us courage to take a step, whether that step be walking immediately over to Servant Central or just dropping a thing in a box or showing up at a home group this week or to Celebrate Recovery for the first time. Help us take a step. Help us. It's for Your beautiful name I pray. Amen."

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