

My name is Jeremy. My primary responsibility here is the Student ministry. That would be student's grade 6-12. I also oversee the Connections ministry. I oversee half of the multigenerational home groups. My wife and I are benefactors of the Recovery ministry. We both went through the Step Studies. And my wife and I are home group leaders. So basically what that means is I have a vested interest in almost every ministry in the church. I'm not saying that brag or anything like that, but I say this for one reason and one reason only, that my hope, my deepest desire outside of men and women changed by the gospel of Jesus Christ and seeing men and women grow into the fullness of everything He has for them, is to see men and women get plugged into the life of the body. Here's what I know. If you're not plugged into the life of the body, you are not growing into the fullness of Christ.

So I came to the Village in 2004. My wife and I moved up here from Abilene and moved to Coppel. I remember the very first time I came to the Village. We had been looking for a church home for a little while and weren't able to find one. But we knew Matt and a couple of other people who had gone to the Village, and so I decided to go and check it out. I remember the first song they sang that day. It was Michael Bleecker and Lauren Chandler singing 'Tis So Sweet. The reason I remember that song is because it was that moment I began to develop a bit of a man crush on Bleecker. Now I'm over it. It's a little inappropriate to have a man crush on someone who is on your staff, so I'm over it. But I remember that. The worship was great, and I was like, "Oh, this is going to be good." So Matt stands up and he's just starting his Love series where he talks about *rayah*, *ahava* and *dowd*. He was starting that series and he stands up and start to speak, and the Holy Spirit commences to kick the trash out of me. In the most loving and gentle way possible, the Holy Spirit starts to move and massage my heart. So my wife and I are leaving that and we both just feel horrible, but horrible in the best way possible. Because the Holy Spirit is moving, and that's a good thing. We were like, "This is home. We have found a home." We joined not long after that. But that same night, God lays some things on my heart that He says I need confess. He goes, "Hey, you need to confess these things." So I start thinking of all my Christian buddies, all those Christian guys I hang out with, and I start calling. Once I called all three of them and none of them had answered, I finally came to realize I needed to confess these things to my wife. So I sit down with her, and here's the amazing thing about my wife. We have just this amazing, grace-filled conversation. It was great. So I got to share with her and I think she got to know me more deeply after that.

But here's the other thing I found out about. Outside of my wife, who had just learned some things about me, nobody else knew me. So when we talk tonight, we're going to talk a little bit about community, what it looks like and how we get there, but just know that when we talk about community, there is a reason that your pastors stand up before you and say that you need to be connected, you need to be in biblical community. It's because, for the most part, we experience it. We know what community can do in our life. We know what the Holy Spirit does through community. So we're going to read, and we're going to have to do a little work, but here's what we're building to. We're building to verses 25-26 in Hebrews 10. When we get there, I'm going to pull out some implications for our family. But here is what I want you to keep in the front of your mind: biblical community. You're not going to hear anything new tonight, but hopefully it will reiterate and reinforce the idea that somebody needs to know you.

With that in mind, let's read. Hebrews 10, starting in verse 19, "Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God. . ." We'll stop there because I think we need to

do a little bit of work. That “therefore” is pointing back to the first nine and a half chapters of Hebrews. Basically here’s what the author is doing. He is laying a theological framework for Christ’s total supremacy over everything. So he’s going to use things like, “Jesus Christ is the greater Moses. . . Jesus Christ is our great high priest. . . Jesus Christ is our advocate.” So Jesus Christ reigns supreme over all things. If it helps, think of Old Covenant and New Covenant. In the Old Covenant, God takes Moses up on top of the mountain and He gives him the Law, the Ten Commandments. Then over the next forty years, He lays out, “When you transgress the Law, when you break My Law, this is how you’re going to come to Me. I’m going to tell you what sacrifices to bring, whether it’s a drink offering, a grain offering or a sin offering. These are the things that you will bring to Me.” And then He establishes the priest and says this, “You will take these offerings to these men, and these men will mediate for you on your behalf.”

You can see a great picture of that in Moses. When anything goes on, Moses is the judge. And then it goes to Joshua and so on. So the people will go to Moses and say, “Hey Moses, this is going on. Go talk to God for us.” And there’s this story where the people of Israel sent twelve spies into the land of Canaan. The spies come back and ten of them say, “I don’t know if you’ve been there, but the guys who live there are pretty big. So I don’t think we should go in. In fact, I think we should just stay here.” And of course there were two who said, “God is on our side. We can do this.” But the people of Israel decide to stay and not go into Canaan. And God gets angry. In fact, He gets so angry that He says, “I am going to kill everyone, Moses, and I’m going to start over with you. They dishonor Me, they blaspheme Me and they don’t trust Me. I’m going to kill them all, and I’ll start over with you.” And Moses says, “No. For the glory of Your name, don’t let people think You brought the people out of Egypt just to kill them here.” So we see a great example of how Moses mediates for the people on their behalf. So when the author says that Jesus Christ is the greater Moses, he means that He opens this curtain through His flesh. Once a year, the high priest is allowed to go into a place called the Holy of Holies. There is a veil that separates the Holy of Holies from the rest of the temple. So once a year, after this long ritual cleansing, the high priest is able to go in there (with no guarantee God won’t strike him down for being unclean), and he sprinkles blood on the mercy seat. Here’s the thing about the Holy of Holies. The direct presence of God is in that place. Old Covenant is, “Here’s the law. When you transgress it, here’s how you’ll come to Me.”

That stands in stark contrast to the New Covenant. So Jesus Christ, the fulfillment of the Law, the fulfillment of that Old Covenant, He comes and live a perfect life, dies a brutal death on the cross and then rises triumphantly over sin and death. And because of that, He has opened through the curtain of His flesh a new and living way. So where we had to go to a high priest to mediate for us before, now Jesus Christ the Son of God sits at the right hand of God and He mediates for us. He intercedes for us on our behalf. Old Covenant – New Covenant. There is this new and living way that is opened up through His flesh.

Let’s keep reading. So because Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of the Old Covenant and because He has opened up this new and living way through His flesh, the author of Hebrews says this in verse 22, “. . . since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.” Since Jesus Christ has come, since everything is different, let us pursue God. We have access to the Father. We no longer need a human priest to intercede for us. We no longer need a human priest to mediate for us. We have Jesus Christ, and so we are free to pursue the God of the universe, who from the beginning has been pursuing us. Here’s the beautiful thing about this. Here are words that describe us before we come to Christ. We are hostile in our minds towards God. We are alienated from God. We are far off from God. And now because of Christ and His sacrifice on the cross, we have been brought near. We have been brought near by the blood, so let us draw near to Him. What does it look like to draw near? We need to participate in those things that stir our affections for Christ. What are those things that stir your affections towards Him? And then we need to stay away from those things that rob us of our affections for Christ. We pursue God by pursuing the things that stir our affections for Him and we stay away from those things that would rob us of that affection.

And then there's that last line there, which I love. We have hearts that have been sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies have been washed with pure water. It reminds me of this verse in Ezekiel 36:25-27. "I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules." So here's what He says. "I am going to rescue you. And when I do, I'm going to make you clean." So you know your heart, right? You know those things that even now bring your shame when you think on them. You just feel this condemnation and shame and you can't shake it. But here's what God says. "I am going to cleanse you of these things. I am going to strip you of your idols, all of them. It's going to hurt, but I'm going to strip you of all of them. I'm going to take your heart, your cold lifeless heart, and I'm going to breathe life into it. I'm going to make it beat for Me. And not only am I going to do that, but I'm going to put a new spirit in you, I'm going to cause you to obey Me. I'm not asking you to obey Me; I'm telling you. I'm going to move you to obedience. I'm not asking you to change; I'm telling you that you will be changed."

So if you're like me, that's a comforting thought to know that the God of the universe isn't going to let me continue on in whatever sin it is that I'm in. He's going to change my heart. He will move me to obedience. Now it might take a while for me to get there, but God always gets what God wants. So He will change my heart. This isn't up to me. That's why this is so comforting to me. If it's left up to me, it won't happen. Because I know how wicked I am, I know how broken I am and on top of that I know how stubborn I am. But God says, "I will change your heart. I will write My Law on your heart and I will cause you to obey Me. I'm going to wash you clean, I'm going to strip you of all your idols and then I'm going to move you to cherish more than anything that which should be cherished more than anything, and that's Me."

Verse 23, "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful." So what is the confession of our hope? It's simply that Jesus Christ came, lived a perfect life, died a death that we should have died and then He rose on the third day. The confession of our hope is the gospel. The confession of our hope is that when God saves me, he's going to change me. That's the confession of our hope. So here's the conversation that I have a lot. "Man, I just wish I didn't struggle the way I struggle. I just wish that I would be changed already. I wish that I didn't deal with this sin in this way. I wish I didn't get angry when this happened. I wish I didn't use my eyes to look at these particular things. I just want to be changed. And I boils down to this, I just want to be better." So as a staff, last week we went to the Association of Biblical Counselors conference. It was a really great weekend to hang out with friends and hear some great teaching. There was a guy there named Tullian Tchividjian, who is Billy Graham's grandson. Something he said, I thought it was so profound. I don't know why I thought it was profound because I should have known and understood it. But when he said it, it just blew me away. He said, "The only people who get better are the people who understand that their right standing before God doesn't depend on them getting better." So the confession of our hope is that, from beginning to end, salvation is a work of the Lord. So I think that we grasp well and understand that Christ paid the debt, He paid the bill for all those things that I did before I met Him. I understand that there is coming a day when He will raise me to new life and I'll have a glorified body just like He did. And then I'll struggle with sin the way I struggle with sin now. But what we don't get and have a hard time grasping is that the same gospel, the same blood that covers all those sins that we committed before we met Him and that blood that is powerful enough to move us into a new life eternally is the same blood that covers all our sin right now. Do we get that? Do we get that the blood of Christ is powerful enough for now, not yesterday, not tomorrow, right now?

So the confession of our hope is, "Yeah, I struggle, I fall down, but Christ has paid for this." So I get up, I dust myself off and I move on. I hold fast to the confession of my hope without wavering. Why? Because the One who promised is faithful. And we see it from the beginning to Scripture to the very end. We hear it in the garden when He tells Adam and Eve that there will come one who crushes the head of the serpent. That promise finds its fruition in Christ. He tells

Abraham, "I'm going to make a nation out of you, and out of this nation, I'm going to bless the world." That promise finds its fruition in Christ. He tells Moses, "Hey, go deliver My people from bondage and slavery in Egypt." And that finds its fruition in Christ when He delivers us from the bondage and slavery of sin. He tells David, "You are going to be a great king, but your line will rule forever." That promise finds its fruition in Christ our great God and King who sits at the right hand of the Father right now. He is alive right now. He rules, He reigns right now. So our God, from beginning of Scripture, He is faithful. We can trust what He tells us because He has always been faithful. Do we get that we're the ones who break covenants, not God? He keeps His covenants. And we can take Him at His word, because He is faithful. And so we hold fast to the confession of our hope because God is faithful.

Verse 24, "And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near." Here's how I understand my role as a believer, not as a pastor. First and foremost I am the herald of the gospel. I am the herald of the good news that Christ came and He died on our behalf. I am to call men and women to be reconciled to God. Second, I am to consider how to stir up my brothers and sisters love and good deeds. The word "stir up" translated means "incite." I am to incite you to good works, like a love and good works riot. How do I do that? By not neglecting to meet together and encourage one another. You cannot stir if you do not know, and you cannot be stirred if you are not known.

Here's the example I always use. I've been on staff for about two years now, but I remember our first ever staff retreat. Our staff retreat is just a great week at Pine Cove. We get to go, we rest, we relax, we read, we play, we worship and we just hang out. It's a really beautiful time. So when we left to go to staff retreat, my wife and I were in Step Studies, and I had been a little lazy in my inventory. So I decided I was going to use staff retreat as a time to catch up on that. So I spent the whole week going through my inventory, writing it all down. I thought I was a champ. I thought I was soldering through it. I thought, "This is going to be great." But I remember walking into worship on Thursday night, the last night of staff retreat and just feeling shame and condemnation. Because as I'm going through my inventory, here's what I'm reminded of. My grandfather was not a great man. When he was 52, he got in a car, was chased my grandmother down and shot her with a shotgun through the windshield and it killed her. So my father, when he turns 52, he decided that he no longer wanted to be married to my mother and so he left. I remember this because it was a New Year's morning when he says, "Hey, I don't want to be married anymore. I don't want to do this anymore." And he left. He walked out and went to live with another woman. It was crazy. So this is what this births in me, this weird fear that my grandfather goes crazy and shoots my grandmother in his early fifties, my father goes crazy and he decides he's going to leave his family in his early fifties and here I am at 27 years old and I'm thinking, "This is what's waiting for me." So I'm sitting there on Thursday night with my head in my hands just thinking about all this. Steve Hardin, who had just finished giving us a talk over the Holy Spirit and being faithful and obedient to share those things the Holy Spirit lays on your heart, walks off the stage and they start playing music. Lee Lewis, who is our care and recovery pastor, walks up to me and says, "Hey, I was supposed to tell you this on Tuesday but didn't. Sorry for that. But I just want to tell you now those sins of your grandfather, those sins of your father, those things in your family history, they don't own you. God has freed you from that, and He will use you for His glory. So in that moment, when I'm sitting there thinking, "When is the other shoe going to drop? At what point am I going to go crazy and make all the same mistakes my grandfather and father made?," the Holy Spirit, through Lee Lewis, reminds me of the confession of my hope. And He stirs me and He encourages me. But if Lee Lewis doesn't know me, if Lee Lewis isn't faithful and obedient to do what the Holy Spirit has called him to do, that would have never happened. But here's the honest truth. I would have eventually come out of that funk, but that's not what happened. Lee Lewis knows me, he loves me and he came and spoke truth to me when I needed to hear it. So my role is to figure out how to stir up my brothers and sisters to love and good works and to encourage them.

So it's difficult to do that outside of the context of community. You hear us talk about it all the time that you need to get into groups, you need to biblical community, and my fear is always that you will associate community at the Village with

home groups. But we don't have enough home groups. So I'll insert my shameless plug about home group leaders here. If you feel led or have ever felt led to lead a home group, fill out an application, send it to me, to John Warren, to Lan Leavell or Clint Crawford. Because the reality is we have more people who need groups than we have groups to put them in. But let me be clear, just because you're not in a group doesn't exclude you from the responsibility to walk in biblical community. And just because you're in a home group, it doesn't not exclude you from the responsibility of walking in biblical community. The two are not mutually exclusive.

So when we talk about community at the Village, here's what we mean. Also at the ABC conference, there was a guy named Paul David Tripp. As a staff, we got a couple of chances to hear him in the Fall. Here's the way Tripp defines community, and I think it's really good. You don't want community. You can find community anywhere. You can find community at the bar, you can find community at the gym, you can find community in any number of places. Community doesn't have to happen at the church. Community doesn't have to happen with believers. So when we talk about community, here's what we mean. We need solid, sound, biblical community. Tripp says it looks like this, "It's intentionally intrusive, Christ-centered, grace-driven, redemptive community." So for me here's what it looks like. I have men who love me enough to assert themselves into every area of my life, into my finances, into my family, into my thoughts, into my fears, into my anxieties, into my anger. They ask me pointed, direct questions. And a lot of these questions, I have given them to ask. Because I know me and if you give me a question I can dance around, I'm going to dance around it. But if you ask me a pointed and direct question, I can do one of two things. I can lie about it or I can tell the truth and start the healing process. So we want your community to be intentionally intrusive, someone knowing every area of your life, every dark part of your heart and going after it.

It needs to be Christ-centered. So we just talked about the confession of our hope. So when someone hears and confesses to us, we don't become their cheerleader, but we point them back to Christ, we point them back to Scripture, we remind them of the confession of their hope, we remind them that God is faithful and that He who began the good work is going to be faithful to complete it. We point them back to Christ.

Biblical community is intentionally intrusive, Christ-centered and grace-driven. I know the response of my guys when I call them. I can tell you what they're going to do. I know when I call Huntley Alderman and confess something to him, he's going to say, "Christ paid for that. You're already forgiven. I'm going to pray for you. I'm going to walk with you." And he will. I know that when I call Brian Benson, he's going to crack a joke, but then he's going to be faithful for three weeks afterward to text me every day difficult questions and to let me know that he's going to pray for me, and then he prays for me. I know that when I talk to Beau Hughes, he's going to say, "I love you. It's not okay, but I love you." So with the grace that has been extended to us, we extend that grace to our brothers and sisters in Christ, remembering that we are broken and fallen just like they are and that we still need a Savior just like they do.

Biblical community is intentionally intrusive, Christ-centered, grace-driven and the hope behind it all is it's redemptive. So we say we want you to grow into the fullness of Christ and we don't think that has happened outside of the context of community. The hope is that as we walk together, as we call one another to the carpet over our sin, as we extend grace, as we extend mercy, a beautiful change happens, that the Holy Spirit moves and works in a way that only He can through us. Because in those moments when things go dark, we need community. For me, sometimes I just go dark. In my mind, in my spirit, things get dark, and I need my community, I need these men who love me to come and speak truth to me, to remind me that I need to draw near with full assurance, to remind me that my heart has been sprinkled clean and my body has been washed with pure water, to remind me to hold fast to the confession of my hope without wavering because the God who promised is faithful, to remind me why I need community when I don't want it, when I don't like it. It's redemptive.

So I wouldn't call my self exhibitionistic confessional, but I have learned that as we walk in this, as we practice this, it doesn't ever get easy, but it gets easier. You're never going to be the feel good guy who walks up and says, "Hey, this is all my junk this week." We're still going to try to talk ourselves out of it. We're still going to try to get ourselves not to do it. We're still going to give ourselves excuses as to why we don't need to. But the truth is, if we know the truth and we understand the truth, when we confess and have those who love us and walk with us who are faithful to pray with us, that it's for our good, our growth.

So I grew up in a church of 150 people. I was involved in everything. I'm that guy. Jesus saves me when I was 12. So I was at church every Sunday, every Sunday night, every Wednesday, every youth rally, every youth camp, every Disciple Now, every Bible study. I did all of these things, but the truth is absolutely no one knew me. I was a good Christian kid, but no one knew me. And then my wife and I got married, we moved to a church of about 700, and the excuse we used was, "The reason no one knows us is because the church is too big. If there weren't so many people, more people would know us, more people would try and walk with us." And then we moved to the Village. So when we started, there were about 1,200 people. Now we've grown to upwards of 7,000 on a weekend. So that would be a good excuse not to get connected, but it would be just that. Because the truth is community doesn't happen because you sit in a home group. Community doesn't happen because you walk in and walk out of here every week with a group of friends. That's not community. It doesn't just happen.

So Lan Leavell is my mentor. Now he didn't walk up to me and say, "Jeremy, I see something special in you. I think I want to mentor you, I want to disciple you, I want to pour my wisdom, my knowledge, my Lanisms, I want to give you all of these things." That's not what happened. I went after him and I bugged him and I bugged him until finally he just gave up and said okay. So I'm going to suggest to you, if you want someone to mentor you, if you want someone to disciple you, go after them, and then you hound them until they relent. If you're serious about your walk, if you're serious about your faith, you go after them, you will go after community.

So how do we find it here? Obviously we've got home groups, not enough though. There is also ministry. Beau would say that if you want to see how a good home group should function, you should be able to walk into one of our staff meetings and see. The same goes for ministries. If you want to see how a good home group functions, you should be able to step into one of our ministries and see. So we announced that Little Village needs volunteers. The hope behind that isn't that we're exploiting you for your time and talent (although there is a little bit of that). The hope behind that is, as you are mingling, as you are praying with other believers in Christ, that you have the opportunity to develop community. So Courtney Nance, who heads up that ministry, every Sunday before she sticks you in a room with those babies, is going to call you together and pray with you, not just pray for the day, not just pray for the children, but she will pray for you specifically. "What's going on in your life, how can we as a body pray for you?" So maybe community for you looks like you going to Connection Central and going, "Hey, I want to serve. I want to get plugged into a ministry." Maybe community for you looks like grabbing a friend who you've come with week in and week out and saying, "Hey, I want to be known. I want you to know me." Maybe it looks like grabbing your roommate and saying, "This is what we need." Because what we can do as pastors, is we can put you places and give community the opportunity to flourish, but if you don't want it, it's not going to happen. And we get lonely, frustrated and we feel shame and condemnation because we're trying to do this whole thing on our own because we were never meant to. We were meant to be surrounded by men and women who would stir us up to love and good works and who would encourage us. Oh to be known.

So here are a couple of questions. Number one: Who knows you? I know when I ask myself that question, the answer was, "My wife knows me." Don't get me wrong, your wife needs to know you, your husband needs to know you. I would definitely say that's someone who needs to know you, but outside of that, I didn't have a good answer. So what I did was decide, "These are some men who need to know me." So the next question that you need to ask yourself is, "Who has to

know me? Who knows me right now? Who knows everything about me? Who knows the darkest parts of my heart? Who knows where I struggle? Who knows where I fail? Who knows me? Who has to know me? Who has to know the darkest parts of my heart? Who has to know where I struggle? Who has to know where I fail?" So maybe tonight we take a little time to answer those two questions. Maybe tonight we take a little time to think on our community or our lack of it. I don't know what that looks like for you. I know what it should look like, but I don't know your people, only you do.

Let's pray. "Father, You are good, and we thank You for that. I thank You for faithful men and women who love You deeply to stir other believers on to love and good works and to encourage one another. God, I pray specifically for those in here who have that community, who are walking in it faithfully. God, I pray that You would continue to grow them, that You would continue to sanctify them, that You would continue to mold and shape them to look more and more like Your Son. And I pray for those in here tonight who aren't known by anyone. God, I pray that even now, You would lay names and faces on their hearts of people to chase. I pray that You would lay names on their hearts of who has to know them. But we confess that we need You. We want to be able to hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, but sometimes we waver. So we say that we believe and would You help us in our unbelief. We thank You for Your goodness and Your grace towards us. We thank You for Jesus Christ, the One who paid for all of our sin on the cross. I pray that we would believe that that gospel is powerful for today. So be glorified, Father. We pray these things in the strong name of Christ. Amen."

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