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Hey! How are you all doing? Did you enjoy worshipping the Lord this morning? [Congregation responds with applause and: Amen!] Isn't that good? It's always good to do that.

As important as that is, I can tell you there's a lot—if this is all you do is come to church on Sunday morning—there's a whole lot that you're missing. In fact—statistically I can prove this out for you—but, if you are not dynamically attached to about six or so people in a church and you've been here longer than two months, chances are you're going to go somewhere else. Or, you're not going to go anywhere at all, which is usually the case here in America.

So I want this morning to talk about *God at Work in Us Through Belonging*. I want you to understand that the greatest catalyst for spiritual growth is not just worship, but it's in belonging. And I'm going to explain to you what that is in just a few moments.

1. [**Worship.**] Right now in this room—we are worshipping—usually anywhere from a hundred people to thousands will gather together. When that happens, chances are you're not going to know everybody. Chances are it's going to be a nice, anonymous place for you to be. But then there are even different ways that you can connect other than worshipping here.
2. [**Serve.**] One of the things that a lot of us do is serve inside of our church. When you begin to serve, chances are—up to a minimum of about 25 people—you're going to at least know names and faces and (kind of) share a common interest and bond together because you guys are serving the Lord.
3. [**Belong.**] The third and most important place is to belong—to be in a small group. Because it is there, in the context of relationships—not necessarily in the room, but relationships that you will develop because you are in the room—that your spiritual growth really begins.
4. [**2 a.m. Friends.**] Then finally it's your 2 a.m. friends. Are you at the place in this church right now where you say you've got a list of one to three people that you knew in this church that you are doing life with; that if you call them at 2 a.m. about anything, no matter where you were, they were going to respond to the need that you had—not just your spouse, not a pastor—somebody who is living life with you?

Do you know what the Church should be about? The Church should be about making sure:

- That people are connected to people
- That life is connected to life
- That we are going to stay together no matter what

In 2002 (if you remember) there was the Miracle at Quecreek Mine in Somerset, Pennsylvania. Remember they were drilling down there and they drilled into an old shaft and all of the water started coming in. Those miners—9 of them I believe there were—were confined in a space that was 48 inches high and 18 feet wide in 55 degree water. Do you remember that? And they had to drill down there. This is what they said [paraphrased]: When we were there we got to the point when we were under that water and we popped up into this air hole; that we decided that we

were going to hold onto one another so that nobody drifted away. And that we were either all together going to live and be rescued, or we all together were going to die. But nobody would be allowed to go under alone or to drift away alone. And so they wrapped themselves around one another.

That is a beautiful picture of what the Bible describes as the Church. In *Ecclesiastes chapter 4, verses 9 through 12*—these scriptures are going to come up on the screens. If you don't have a Bible there's one in the church—church rack—the pew rack in front of you. Whatever that thing is, there's a book there, it's a Bible, and you can have it. This is what *Ecclesiastes* says.

⁹ Two people can accomplish more than twice as much as one; they get a better return for their labor. ¹⁰ If one person falls, the other can reach out and help. But people who are alone when they fall are in real trouble.

Ecclesiastes 4:9-10 (NLT, 1996 edition)

Do you ever watch those reality stories about the people—? I'm Alive [on *Animal Planet* network]—it's great. I just started watching that. I'm kind of addicted to that one. [There's] a story about a young woman who was a marathoner and a distance runner. She lived in Utah. She went out to one of the canyons and she didn't tell anyone where she was going and as she was running she fell. She fell off of a cliff and she broke her pelvis. The only thing/person with her was a dog. After three days they finally found her because the dog went and got the rescuers and showed [them] where she was.

But can you imagine? Can you imagine when you fall in life—and when I fall in life—and it's not a dog that's going to be speaking to our souls and helping us out of our pit? We are going to be in big trouble and everybody falls. Everybody goes through tough stuff. Everybody goes through uncharted water where they could use a few friends, who maybe have been down there, or at least would encourage and stand by and not let you drift away.

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 4:12 (NLT, 1996 edition)

Anybody fighting with you? Anybody fighting for you? Do you have one or two friends that have gathered around your soul and they speak the truth in love to you? And no matter what you're walking through or how the winds are blowing, they are there with you. They are there to ensure that you're not going to fall down. Or if you do fall down, you are going to get back up. And they are going to minister to you and they are going to love you.

Do you know what church is about? Here it is:

CHURCH IS ALL ABOUT EVERYBODY NOT LETTING YOU GO OR GIVE UP ON YOU

Church is all about everybody—everybody, every one of us—never letting you go, never letting you drift away, or give up on you. We all have a common faith, it is Jesus Christ. We have a hope in Jesus Christ. There is the fact that God loves us—

- Sent His Son to die for us
- Has put His Spirit in our heart

And as much as He loves us, we love one another. This is not an organization that we have come to; it is a living, thriving organism. It is the visible manifestation of the love of God for the people of the world. And it's found in our hearts.

Now, this is the 21st century. God's original intent can always be found in the Bible. You always should go back to the Bible and say:

- What did God want?
- What was God doing originally?

In the book of *Acts*—the acts of the Holy Spirit, when the Spirit of God started moving through the followers of Christ in developing the Church—here's what happened. "That day"—and this is *The Message* version. I love how Eugene Peterson translates this to get the meaning:

That day about three thousand took him at his word {as Peter preached, they—} were baptized and were signed up.

Acts 2:41 (The Message)

Now let me stop here for one second. You're part of the Church. Not only when you say, "I have given my life to Jesus Christ," but when you are baptized you are showing everybody else, [who've] had that same experience inside of their heart, that you have had the same experience—that you are a follower.

- You are marking yourself.
- You are signing up.

You are saying: Yeah, not only am I a part of this invisible Church around the world; I'm a part of a local church—a visible body of believers that I can go to and say hey, I've got the same Jesus you have, and I want to be a part of what God is doing here.

So you can attend church and you can be saved, but you're not a part of a church until you've been baptized. Following Christ in believer's baptism is the most basic first step that you can take.

And they did that. Then what happened?—Ready?

They committed themselves to the teaching of the apostles...

Acts 2:42 (The Message)

Which is good; that's what we do. We're committed to the Word of God. When we gather on weekends we speak the Bible. We want to know:

- What does the Bible say?
- What does God have to say about those things?

But again, you can have all the information—all the knowledge of the Bible—and yet not have everything that God has for you because of the following things—and the life together: "...the life together." [Acts 2:42 (*The Message*)]

In other words, they just weren't coming and showing up at worship, and hearing the preacher speak; and then going off to lunch, and going/doing their things without any contact with one another. They shared a life together. They weren't all alone. They had—

⁴² ...the common meal, and the prayers. ⁴³ Everyone around was in awe—all those wonders and signs done through the apostles! {Ready? Here, I love this.} ⁴⁴ And all the believers lived in a wonderful harmony...

Acts 2:42-44 (The Message)

God hasten the day that *that* happens—when we actually get along and love being with each other. They loved it! This is why: God was doing this; the Spirit was moving in their hearts. They held "everything in common." [Acts 2:44 (*The Message*)]

We hold everything that we have in common:

- We have a Heavenly Father
- We have Jesus Christ
- We have the Spirit of God
- ...the giftings of the Spirit
- We all have a purpose in the body of Christ

We are holding together in common. But not only that, even their physical things—

⁴⁵ They sold whatever they owned and pooled their resources so that each person's need was met. {Now I love these next two verses.} ⁴⁶ They followed a daily discipline of worship in the Temple {—then what?—} followed by meals at home, every meal a celebration, exuberant and joyful, ⁴⁷ as they praised God.

Acts 2:45-47a (The Message)

Now listen. How would you like to be in a church like that? Where now after you heard the teaching, you got in somebody's home and—

- You guys were eating together (and)
- You were talking about what God was doing in your life (and)
- You were ministering to one another (and)
- Somebody was in trouble and you were helping them (and)
- Somebody was discouraged and you were encouraging them (and)
- Somebody was joyful and you were rejoicing with them

But every time you got together it was a celebration of what God was doing in your life. That is what church is supposed to be. And you can't do it in the big room. You have to do it in smaller groups of people.

That's why I'm so jealous of the way that we get to do this at *Fry* [*Road Campus*]. The way we get to do it at *Fry* is we actually get to go into people's homes, because we don't have a building. Isn't that great? There is no building over there. It's hard because they've got to set up every Sunday, but there's no building. And if there's no building—buildings usually drive programming that drives everything else that you do; they drive you further away from what you ought to be doing sometimes.

Here's what we do at church—here's what we ought to be doing at church—ready?

WE CONNECT LIFE-TO-LIFE, PERSON-TO-PERSON IN COMMUNITY

Life-to-life, person-to-person in community [repeated for emphasis]. Now you're thinking: If I could just get to the preacher, I would have somebody [who] loves me and knows and understands and can help me. I am but one person. There are thousands in this church. And they've got different giftings and different experiences. And God has designed the Body that it works in harmony. And who you need isn't a staff person. Who you need is that person [who's] on the pew with you, that person [who] is walking in the door. But if you never get together—if you never get together—you never receive what God wants to do in and through your life through other people.

(You know) this is the real deal, no-frills, non-packaged, stripped-down version of Christianity that Jesus talked about. Unless we are interdependent with one another, we never grow, and we drift away.

Now in the 21st century, here's what church is about. Church is all about the big event on the weekend. That's what church is all about in the 21st century. Church is all about everybody sitting out there looking right here [gesturing to his own face]. I'm pouring out the information and the facts and the inspiration. I'm doing anything that I can to encourage you and motivate you and stimulate you.

But in the first century the emphasis wasn't on: Hey, you all come and listen; you all line up and look. The emphasis was about: Hey, let's everybody circle up and get attached to one another. In the first century they didn't worry about attendance—God was moving, people were being saved—they worried about attachment: How do we attach to one another's lives so what God is doing through us can help and encourage one another?

IT'S NOT ABOUT ATTENDANCE, IT IS ABOUT RELATIONSHIP

This is a catalyst—inside this room. When we worship together and we hear the Word of God and God speaks to us, you normally have more questions than you have answers. That's why you get in small groups of people and say: Hey, I want to tell you what I'm sensing and feeling and what's going on. And you know what? Did anybody ever experience that before? Yeah, plenty of people have.

And do you know what people are really looking for today, I believe? I know what I want, and I believe I know the heart of the folks that are coming to church, what they want. Here's what they want:

- They really aren't searching for an organization; there [are] plenty of organizations.
- They're really not looking for great preaching.
- What they're looking for is some kind of intimacy to break the loneliness that they feel and the lack of purpose and the lack of direction.
- Believe it or not they're not interested in agendas.
- They're not interested in by-laws or business meetings or programming or anything like that.
- They want to know: Does anybody here want to help me so that I can find God and so that I can find some meaning and purpose in my life?

That's what people are looking for. Isn't that why you're here? Aren't you here for that? Don't you want someone to walk with you? This is the community in which one another's needs are met. And you can't meet people's needs unless you know people—you just can't do it.

Now, what if—what if the Church in the first century remained true for what it was doing today? And there wasn't a program—wasn't a lot of programming going on. It wasn't about the events. It wasn't about buildings. It wasn't about political agendas. It was just coming together, driven around the truth of Jesus. And when someone begins to drift away and is led astray, we're not going to let them go.

- We were so attached that we knew when they moved.
- We were so attached that we knew when something was going on.
- We were so attached we did life together because we wanted the best for one another.

I'm telling you—and you know this to be true if you've been in church any amount of time—it is weeks sometimes before we say: Oh, my gosh, whatever happened to old Billy Bob anyway? He used to come here all the time. I'll tell you what happened to him, he drifted away. He didn't get on a power jet and move; he just drifted away little by little just like all of us do. And if there's not someone there saying: Hey, hey, come here you're drifting away. Just like those miners [saying]: We're going to live together and be rescued or we are going to die together.

But there's so much other noise in church that if we don't stop and get together at a time during the week and meet with one another to encourage one another, then people are going to drift away. And what's the most important noise in the world? A cry for help [is] the most important thing in the world.

The entire community came out in Somerset, Pennsylvania, to rescue those miners. There wasn't anything more important than to get those people out of that hole. The nation turned its attention on [that].

I'm telling you when church is what church ought to be, there is nothing more important than what you are going through for all of us to make sure you don't drift away. That's what church is about. That's what it ought to be about—

- Not just the event
- Not just the personality
- Not just the preaching

—but the organic fellowship that we have when the Spirit of God is moving through us.

So how did that work out in the *New Testament*? Well, I'll tell you what. It was pretty interesting when you read the book of *Hebrews*. So go to the book of *Hebrews*, *chapter 10*; I'm going to read something to you.

The book of *Hebrews* was written to some Hebrew believers. The church now is Gentile where they are. They're finding it very difficult to blend their heritage and what they were raised in to this primarily Gentile church. And now they're being tempted to drift back into what they used to do. But when they drift back they find: We don't even fit there anymore because we have associated with Gentiles and to our Jewish friends they're unclean. Our parents and loved ones have disowned us. We're not wanted in the synagogue. But how do we fit in the church?

You ever ask: How do you fit in the church? I mean, I did when I first got saved. I hadn't been in an evangelical, Bible-preaching church in my life until I was nearly 22 years old. And I walk in; I didn't know what to do. I didn't even know where to park. I just kind of stumbled around and found my way.

Now, I'm the personality that when I walk in a room the party has started! So I'm going to find my way around. But 98 percent of the people in the world aren't like me—and everybody said: Amen!—no, they're [thinking]: Am I going to be accepted? [My personality says]: You are going to accept me—or you will tolerate me—because I'm not going to go away. But many people feel: If I'm not accepted, what am I supposed to do?

- They're going to not even going to get out of the car sometimes
- They can't even find a parking spot
- They don't even know: What building do they go into?

And then when I walked in—I'm talking, we're straight-out-of-drug-selling, disco-hopping, long-haired bad-guy, walking in *in* the same clothes, with the same hair, and the same man-bag that he used to carry all of his paraphernalia in. Can you imagine what every father did with their daughters when they saw me? But I found my way around.

Now I'm going to tell you, when people come to church, they want to know:

- Is anybody going to know me?
- How are they going to treat me?
- Do they love me?

- Will they want me to stay? (and)
- When they really find out who I am, what are they going to do then?

That's why we get people in small groups to say: We're all like that and we're all welcome and we're all wanted here; and God's going to do a work in all of our lives.

WE NEED CLEARLY DEFINED NEXT STEPS

Next step: Where do I go? What do I do?

I didn't know. I mean, I was sitting there listening to this guy in a suit yelling at me about the Bible, that I couldn't even find *John* from Moses, and didn't even know that Moses wasn't even a book! All I knew is: every time this guy talked, my heart was going to just jump out of my chest, and I had to do something. So I saw people walking forward. So I figured:

- Well that's what you do, you go forward
- They must put holy water on there
- Or it's communion or something—what I was used to
- Maybe it's confession time

I didn't know. I just knew: everyone else is doing it, so I did it. I walked up to him. I said what every good Catholic boy says when he walks up to a priest: Forgive me, father, for I have sinned. Now he was sweet about it and they walked me through it. But I had to discover that on my own.

That shouldn't be the case—ever—with anybody. That ought to be clearly marked: Here's where you go.

Now this is what happens [in] *Hebrews, chapter 10, verses 23 through 25*:

²³ Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. ²⁴ And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds.

Hebrews 10:23-24 (NIV)

Now here's what he's saying here. Are you ready? First of all, he uses the word *unswervingly*, "Let us...unswervingly..."

Have you ever watched somebody swerve in traffic, maybe [who] had too much to drink and they were driving?

I watched this happen on the beltway one time early in the morning when I was going fishing. I mean (you know) the quick jerks like that [pantomimes jerking a steering wheel] and the swings over [pantomimes lazily turning a steering wheel] and kind of waking up and doing that [pantomimes wide-eyed jerking the steering wheel first one direction then over-correcting it back again]. He headed right for the toll [booth] where all the big yellow things [lane barriers] are. I said: There's going to be one big crash. (I mean) I had my phone ready and I was getting ready—all the police always hang out there anyway. So as soon as this—I knew he was going to hit and the whole thing was going to blow up. I'm telling you he's doing this [pantomimes weaving back

and forth] and he gets about (literally) ten feet away from that yellow deal [toll plaza] and he [drove]—boop!—straight through it. That dude needs to go play the lottery, because he will win.

Unswervingly means: Let's not look to the left or the right; this is the main thing. Let's not get off track of what the main thing is—this hope that we profess that we love God and God loves us and we are in this thing together.

Now, what did he say?—"and let us." This is everybody. It isn't just the preacher's responsibility; it's everybody.

Remember when—how many [of you] are old enough that you actually had roller skates that had four rollers on them? [Demonstrates requested response by raising his hand.] Yeah, and you went to the what?—roller rink. You ever do that? And there were only certain times you could skate because—

- If you couldn't skate backwards, sometimes it was a backwards-skate thing. Yeah, remember that? (and)
- If you didn't have a girlfriend, you couldn't go out there either because it was a couples' skate (and then)
- If it was a girls' skate and you were a guy, you couldn't go out there. Now we had a couple of guys that we kept (you know)—now come back here; you're not going out there (and then)
- If you were a girl and weren't a guy during a guys' skate, you couldn't skate

And then all of a sudden it finally happened [pantomimes talking through a loudspeaker]: All skate...all skate.

This is an all-skate verse—all of us—every one of us out on the floor doing this thing. And what is this thing?—considering how we can spur one another.

Considering—the same word that's used for Jesus in a couple of chapters when it says, "Consider him" [*Hebrews 11:11 and Hebrews 12:3*]*—look to. You know what that means? It literally means: to ponder; to dig deeply into; to think about; to focus on; to study.*

Isn't that what we do when we open up the Bible in our relationship with God?

- We just (kind of) stare at the life of Jesus (and)
- We listen to what He has to say (and)
- We try to mimic what He is (and)

By the sensitivity of the Spirit, we're trying to hear what He says to us.

And the way that we peer into the life of Christ—so that we can get direction and guidance; so that we can know Him the way that He knows us—this verse is telling us: Look into one another's lives that way. Look into one another's lives.

But in our culture, to be private and to be an individual is a big, bad thing. But in God's culture:

- To be open and to be transparent means to grow spiritually (and)
- To be connected to people means you are not going to drift away

Now listen to what he says we're supposed to be doing. I'm to know some people in my life—not everybody, some people in my life—that I know well enough that:

- I know what motivates them
- I know where they get tripped up
- I know where they're tempted
- I know when things aren't going well:
 - I can hear it in their voice
 - I can see it in their walk
 - I know by their attendance
- I know what's going on (and)
- I know also what they respond to

So we can bring them back and God can do a work in their life. Do you know people that well?

We don't like doing that in America, do we? I don't want anybody to know me. I just want to drive in, open the gate, close the gate, get in the house, nobody call me, turn the lights off—I think people from the church are coming. That's what we do. Honestly, it's what we do.

But when you spend time with people, here's what you know: I know something that I can spur them. I know what you're thinking: I'd like to spur a few people. But you know when you spur—when you rake a horse—what you're doing. You're trying to motivate them, aren't you? You know what that horse needs. You don't dig every horse the same way. You know sometimes well-trained horses (you know) just need a little pressure. Sometimes they need a good raking. But knowing well enough what I respond to—what you respond to in your heart—that we would be motivated to love and good deeds.

Now, what could go wrong in a relationship like that?—where all I'm doing is:

- I'm trying to know you so well that I know when you're up and down.
- I know what motivates you.
- All I'm trying to do is to love you more
- To get you to love Jesus more

—So that Jesus can do more in your life, whether it's in the good times or the bad times.

Anybody want in? All skate...all skate. You have to do that for somebody else. Somebody else has to do that for you.

"Let us not give up," he goes on to say [in *Hebrews 10:25 (NIV)*]. Let's not give up—literally [means] to abandon in a time of need or danger; to cease caring for.

Have you ever had a real good friend and, all of a sudden one day they weren't your real good friend anymore? Someone who said they loved you. I'm going to be by you. (I mean) I'm going to stick with you. Some of you have been through a divorce and you feel like that. (I mean) some of you have had church friends that you've poured your heart out to only for them to not care and leave and not want to be around you anymore.

This is what he's saying: We need never to abandon in a time of need or danger or cease to care for the people who are in the Church—the Body of Christ. [He says] the absolute opposite: this is

the habit of some, "but let us encourage one another" [*Hebrews 10:25 (NIV)*]*—when you do meet together encourage one another; don't give up...don't give up.*

Some of you are drifting away right now. Not sleepy wise, but you're drifting away spiritually. You know it. There [are] not a whole lot of people [who] know it. When you show up and you come here because nobody knows you, you can get away with anything that you want to do. And it's the stuff that eats at your soul that you wish you didn't know that you did. You hate it, but nobody's there to help you. You're drifting away. And the only way that can stop is when you get into a small group of people and they can help you.

You know what else?—bad things are going to happen to you in your life. It's just life. (You know) I wish it didn't happen, but then it will be Heaven and you would be dead. But bad things happen:

- Marriages break up.
- Kids get sick.
- People die that you love.
- You lose your job.
- You get some kind of sickness.
- You struggle with cancer.
- You have addictive problems.
- You have a personality issue.
- You have courage problems.

Whatever it is (I mean) that's why we're here. And when you get around the people that you need to be around—and they know you well enough to encourage you and to stimulate you and to help you and to love you—you become a better person.

So I want you to know here at this church we have small groups. That's the community that we have. I want you to turn your attention to the screens now and I want you to see how—

COMMUNITY TOGETHER CAN AFFECT YOUR LIFE

[Video testimonies of two members of The MET:]

** Stories of Belonging **

[Alexis:] My name is Alexis Kissick and I am a sixth grade reading and language arts teacher at Hopper Middle School.

[Mark:] My name's Mark Noble. I'm an engineer, chemical engineer. My wife Tammy and I have three kids: Jessica - 23; Chad - 20; Cassidy - 18. We moved into the Tomball area—which is where we are now—and attended a few churches up in this area and then eventually landed at The MET.

[Alexis:] I had just graduated college and came back and decided to start looking at other churches in the area. I went to *Jones* and ended up

meeting Carl and Jen Modesette. They were leading *Salt* at the time. That was my first small group experience, and we met on Tuesday nights at Jen and Carl's house. When I first came here to *Fry* I went back to their same small group. That was my comfort zone. That's what kept me coming back, was just the genuine care that people had.

[Mark:] For years Tammy and I have taught small groups. We started about two-and-a-half years ago the *Good News* group with a small group of people. That has grown to 25/30 people of diverse backgrounds, not only age, but also ethnicity and spiritual maturity.

[Alexis:] I think God really uses *Life Groups* and that opportunity—that closeness—that you don't get on a Sunday morning. It's just that consistent building week to week and asking each other: How are you? Okay, now, *really* how are you?—and being able to be real.

[Mark:] For the first two-and-a-half years our role was to minister to them; and to show them what ministry looked like and what Christ's love looked like by teaching them, by taking care of them, by ministering to them. What we see in the *Life Group* is those three elements:

- We see teaching/learning
- We see fellowship one with another (and)
- We see agape love; which is, love given without thought of anything in return.

[Alexis:] *Life Groups* are just so important, because there are people out there that care. If something (you know) comes up in your life, to have those people—those immediate (you know) speed-dial friends—that you can call at 2 a.m. and say: Listen, I need your help.

[Mark:] On January first of this last year, the kids were heading off to Lake Charles. They got as far as the east side of Houston, were hit by a semi—major accident—none of them should have survived. We've spent the last three weeks trying to care for the kids. And the *Life Group*—the *Good News* group—has come in and taken care of everything. We've got a ramp out front; I've got two kids in wheelchairs. They've got meals planned through February. They took all the Christmas decorations down. They've just given of themselves in a pretty unimaginable way.

[Alexis:] In these other groups that I've been in, they've invested time in me. I think for me the question was: What am I doing with my time? And if I can open up my home to women to come and to meet together, then I need to be doing that. And I wanted to invest that time in others.

[Mark:] The long and the short of it is that they've turned the tides and ministered to us. The kids have experienced Christian community in a way that they haven't before. This is sincere community from God's people.

[Alexis:] The phrase that The MET has, *Live For More*, I really believe *Life Groups* is part of that feel, that community of reaching out there. And if you're looking to live for more, I think *Life Groups* is a fabulous place to start.

* Live for more...join a Life Group *

[Pastor Sal's microphone is turned off when he first begins to speak after the video:] Has it been off this whole time? You're kidding me, right? It's been off the whole time? [Congregation responds: No.] No? Man, I thought: I'm having a flash-back up here.

Here's the question—you ready? This is what you have to answer. The way you answer this will determine whether or not you make it through life with all of its ups and its downs, and its bads [sic] and its goods, and its lonely times and its happy times. If you are a believer, the way you answer this question will determine spiritually what's going to be going on in your life. Are you ready?—

- Are you in community or are you just attending?
- Are you attached to people who are attached to you?

When stuff like you just heard happens, they don't let you drift away. You don't suffer on your own. And when you're new and you're wondering where to go, they're just like—wham!—we're right here with you. What's most impressive is that you may never personally know leadership in the church, but you know the Lord and His leading in your life because of the people that you've surrounded yourself with.

Who are the people that mean the most to you? I mean really, when you boil it down, who are the people that mean the most? Is it the person that can give you the facts? Is it the person that can give advice and solutions and cures? Or is it the person that sits down and shares our pains and touches our wounds and encourages us and holds our hand as we blubber on about what's going on until we get healthy again? I guarantee it's that person there—it's that person.

Are you attached, really? Really attached or are you just attending church? It's a good thing, but you will drift away if you're not attached.

And so this morning, I'm going to ask you to make a commitment and that commitment is to be attached. That commitment is—when you walk out of this building—that you're going to go online immediately or you're going to go right out here to the kiosk and you're going to say: Look, I need to get attached. And if they look kind of weird at you, say: It's what Pastor Sal said. I need to be in a small group [called *Life Groups* at The MET]; show me where to go. Show me where to go.

And here's what's going to happen. In that small group you may not know or really be very familiar with all of them, but over time you will. And about three or four of them, those are the instruments that God is going to use in your life to shape your spirituality and get you through the difficult times. That's what church should be about.

And you know what? God is doing a fresh, reviving work here among us. If you want to know what that is—if you want to be in on what God is doing—you've got to be with His people and you've got to be in relationship and in group and attached with somebody.

So when we're dismissed in a moment, make sure that you go outside and say: I've never belonged to one, but I want to check a few out. And let them take you and show you where you need to go.

So let's pray this morning. Let's pray together—as our heads are bowed and our eyes are closed—and here's the prayer. Is there somebody in your life, right now, that's so attached to you—other than your spouse or a pastor—that's so attached to you that you can go to and you can tell them: This is what's happening?—and the response that you are going to get from them was immediate help and—

- They weren't going to be shocked (and)
- They weren't going to condemn you (and)
- They weren't going to go gossip about you

But they were going to be there to help you, because they are attached life-to-life to you. If you don't have somebody like that—if you don't have a group of people like that—that which you struggle with now will overcome you and it will be your downfall. And you don't have to...you don't have to.

There are some of you here this morning that, not only are you not part of a group, you don't even know God. That's why He brought you here this morning, so that you can know Him. And if you'd like to know God this morning and if you'd like to know Christ as your Savior, would you pray this prayer silently as I do aloud? And it goes like this:

Dear God, I'm not attached to You. My sin has separated me. I ask You to forgive me and to come into my life.

God, all of us at one time or another have made that decision. And what has kept us strong all these years is because we were attached to other people. And, God, I pray for every unattached believer here—every part of the Body that is not attached to the Body—that You would bring them closer to You by bringing them closer to other believers so that we might be strengthened and encouraged. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Now let me tell you what we're going to do. If you just prayed that prayer a second ago, and you would like to know a little bit more about what we do and how that can affect your life, you just did the best thing in the world. You just asked Christ to come into your heart. Remember that portion of the bulletin I told you to tear off a little bit/while ago when we were welcoming one another?—there's a box on there that says: I just prayed to follow Christ. That's what you just

did. If you want to know more and if you want to be attached and you want to know what great things that God has planned for you, check that box and put it in the offering plate when it comes. We will get you the information that you need.

If you're an usher—if you'd get in place please?

If you're here and you want someone to pray for you—you filled out that same card and let us know how—we will. If you want to meet with a pastor before you leave—back here in the *Encouragement Room*—in the back here on my left, your right—there'll be some pastors back there [who] would love to pray for you.

[During] our offering, you'll see a video for *D-Now* that the students are going to be doing pretty soon. If you have teenagers, you need to pay attention to this video. So let's pray together and thank God for taking care of us and about the offering we're getting ready to give.

Father, thank You for providing for us in difficult times. Thank You for our church through which You spiritually, and a lot of times even physically, provide for so many people. And, God, I pray now that Your people would be blessed. Your church needs money and You know that. I pray that you open up the windows of Heaven and bless Your people so they can joyfully bring Your tithe and their offerings. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

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**To them God has chosen to make known among the
Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is
Christ in you, the hope of glory.**

Colossians 1:27
(*New International Version*)

Legend:

(**words in parentheses**) = spoken by the preacher *but unnecessary* to the core sentence idea

[**words in square brackets**] = additional explanation for clarity *not spoken* by the preacher

{**words in curly brackets within indented quote**} = spoken explanation *not part of the quote*