

Called Into a Community of Divine Restoration

Series: What God Has Begun (Recapturing Our Core Values)

September 27, 2015 – Brad Bailey

[PLACED EMPTY CHAIR ON SIDE OF STAGE BEFOREHAND]

Intro

Let me begin with asking a question to stir our own senses...

Why are you here?... Not here on this earth...but here in this gathering?

The reasons may be many... may seem hazy... maybe to learn (good...but information can happen alone)...maybe because you want to honor God in worship ...(good, but that could be done alone.)

> At some level, I believe there is a **CALLING**...by Jesus...a calling **to come... to gather with him... and with others...a calling to gather together.**

As we continue our series engaging our core values...we want to hear... **God's calling into community.** [1a]

As has often been described here and elsewhere...we are **living in a time** when the nature of **community can seem to be everywhere...yet nowhere.** My bank says it's glad to have me be a part of the bank community. [1b]

Yet every bit of social science data that we have that is aimed at measuring the strength of people's relationships, the extent of people's isolation, the number of relational connections people have tell us that Americans in the 21st century are lonelier than ever. Every study about the social well-being of our current culture declares that we bear an underlying loneliness. [1c]

The loneliness that we face as a culture comes from many changes.

Americans are **more solitary** than ever before. You go back to **1950, less than 10% of American** households contained only one person. Fast forward to today, the percentage of Americans who live alone has tripled. **Nearly 30% of American households** have just one person.

Now, solitary living does not mean that you are lonely. But living along can certainly contribute to loneliness. A 2010 survey by AARP ... the American Association of Retired Persons... found that 35% of adults older than 45 describe themselves as chronically lonely, more than one out of three, as opposed to 20% just a decade ago. **A major study on the subject of loneliness** found that **20% of all Americans including young adults**, about 60 million people **are unhappy with their lives because of loneliness.**

George Caywood was the former Director of the Union Rescue Mission...a deeply spiritual leader... and when I had the opportunity to visit him (1989)...I remember him saying...

"Our love of privacy has made us the loneliest people on earth." - George Caywood

It may seem strange to hear how much loneliness lies beneath the surface of our lives **when we have become so connected by technology**. Technology has **created a whole new way of being “connected”**...and in many ways it does serve us socially.

But the **type of connection** that **social media brings** has **significant limits**.

We can come to view it as a substitute for genuine interaction. We become trapped in what **Mark Vernon** calls the **"tyranny of quantity"** – exchanging **dozens of short messages** a day with a **wide array of friends... rather than having one "quality" conversation**.

Sherry Turkle is a psychologist and a professor at MIT, whose primary field of study is the relationship between humans and technology. She wrote a book several years titled “Alone Together.” **She said** everywhere you look people are: **Alone together**.

The problem is not that we are not communicating all the time – communicating through texts, emails, on FB and on Twitter. The problem is **we are talking AT each other and not WITH each other**.

We do well to consider...

“Social media is changing the nature of how we relate. What we must awaken to is how social media can only serve us when we really understand it’s limitations.

Social media offers our loneliness something immediate and easy. Social media offers me people are out there I can connect with...and even have a form of conversation with. The danger is that we stop facing the reality that it is only a passive and partial presence of others. It does not bear the full engagement of others. It does not bear the full presence of another’s will to be with me...their eyes to see me, or their voice to fully speak to me. They cannot fully see us or hear us or speak to us...so they cannot provide the same means to understand us...or to comfort us...and challenge us.

Social media serves our loneliness like a sip of water serves a deep need of thirst. To a traveler parched with thirst, a sip of water may be enough to satisfy for a moment, but it cannot provide what we really need to be healthy. It wets our natural and needed thirst but it cannot satisfy it.” [3]

At some level...

A virtual community is always a virtual community.

Loneliness is not just an issue of for those who may be less popular...ar less socially successful.

Sheryl Crow one of the most popular musical artists and celebrities shared [5]...

“I don't want to spend the rest of my life alone. That's the only true fear I have.”

In a **Rolling Stone** interview, **Trent Reznor**, the lead musician of the rock band Nine Inch Nails, muses on how his anti-religion stance helped lead him into his lapse into depression:

“In my head, that spilled over into an utter-chaos outlook: ‘I don't need anything, I don't need anyone, and I don't need to believe there's any reason to anything.’ It was a pretty self-centered approach. I was lonely and had a bleak outlook on everything. I think people have an inherent need for belonging...”. [6]

The desire for belonging is fundamental to our existence. [6b]

The issue of belonging is ultimately a spiritual one... a transcendent one.

That is what God has willed and worked for our lives...

Ephesians 1:5 (NLT)

“God decided in advance to adopt us into his own family by bringing us to himself through Jesus Christ. This is what he wanted to do, and it gave him great pleasure.”

> **God wanted a family.** That's why we're here. He wanted children. And the Bible says He planned everything in the entire universe so we could be born, so we could share in His glory, so we could be part of His family.

Ephesians 2:19 (ESV)

So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God,

That's a rather profound statement. The family is what **shapes our entire sense of BELONGING... serves as the REFERENCE POINT** for our place in the world. **For some** of us, our earthly experience of belonging has been a **good and helpful taste** of what God intends family to be.... **For others** of us.... **feel adrift...** all of us.... **there is a level of ultimate connection that eludes us.**

> We all long to belong. The pain of not belonging is so deep we can deny it with a façade of independence... but such independence denies our true nature. Where the womb or the world can fail us... God says “welcome.”

There's something that may seem a little **awkward and unnatural** in being told that we are a new family...or new household.

It should feel unfamiliar. It is **not natural** in the way we may think of natural. **Developing community that is rooted in God's work of reconciling all life in Him... isn't part of this natural world.**

It's a bit like what many feel as they begin to discover and develop in a world larger than their families. We may grow up in a family ...for which there is an aspect of coming home that is always familiar...but it's not all that you are becoming. (Many speak of how they as **young adults** would **go home for the holidays**...and feel a certain tension inside...they could **relax in the familiarity**....but feel they **weren't fully understood** because there were new aspects of who they were becoming that didn't fit in the old family way of knowing them. **The new is less familiar but it beckons us towards growth...and becoming more fully what we are meant to be.**

> **In a similar** but more dynamic way..... **how we have been known** in this world's social roles may be familiar...**but when Jesus begins to call us...**something begins to change in us...we sense he is beckoning **towards growth...and becoming more fully what we are meant to be. And that involves a community that shares that beckoning. It doesn't mean that such a community is simply better than our families, but that they share being beckoned by the words and working of Jesus.**

So if we find that our life has multiple communities...and some that are not connected to the "church" feel more "natural" than church...perhaps we shouldn't be surprised. **The community Jesus calls us into is a new eternal community that is not of his earth.**

Imagine when Jesus called his first disciples to come together. They left everything to live and learn together. They likely felt a lot of the same tensions we might. They are willing to drop everything...and then show up and think... wow... so this is now a group. It's a little awkward. Socially it must have been really unfamiliar... uncomfortable... awkward. [7] They were being drawn into the eternal reality entering a fallen darkened world. Their diversity...their discomfort...was part of God breaking in.

Stanley Saunder -

"Jesus calls disciples who together embody the restorative, reconciling, and righteous reign of God. Together, as one body, not merely as a collection of individuals, this group manifests God's inclusive mercy." [8]

Jesus was calling them to be joined into that which reflects "God restoring and reconciling all things..."

2 Corinthians 5:18-20 (GW)

God has ... restored our relationship with him through Christ, and has given us this ministry of restoring relationships. ¹⁹ **In other words, God was using Christ to restore his relationship with humanity. He didn't hold people's faults against them, and he has given us this message of restored relationships to tell others.** ²⁰ **Therefore, we are Christ's representatives, and through us God is calling you. We beg you on behalf of Christ to become reunited with God.**

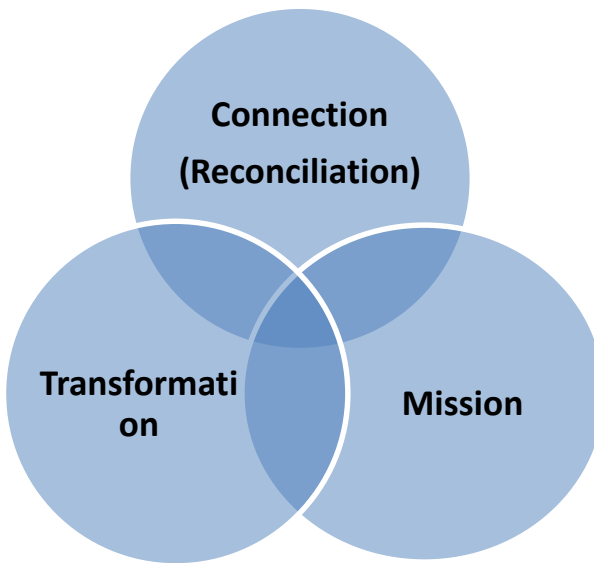
That's bigger than just coming to **another social event** to escape loneliness...or a narrow cause that offers only a fragile connection.

We are called BEYOND all that has defined us... not always an ultimate leaving of it...but a definitive change.

We must hear that it is call to God's reconciling of the world.

Jesus called us into a community that can be described as integrating three elements of restoration.

Connection (Reconciliation), transformation, and mission.



Let's briefly consider these 3 qualities that define the healthy community for our lives.

We are bound as....

1. A reconciling community...restoring our common bonds

The search for community is ultimately the **search for what is common.**

“Community” is defined by what provides our “common – unity”

Here lies the challenge. The loss of some transcendent connection **gives rise to a tendency to find identity through the differences that divide us.**

From **niche marketing and clothing styles... to social cliques and gangs... to ethnic rivalries and nationalism...** we are so hungry to find ourselves...to belong ... that our identify is often simply reduced to that of identifying with some sub-group over and against others. And those connections **prove not only destructive... but dissatisfying.... far too fragile** to really provide the deep connection we long for.

The desperate alternative is to try and simply diminish our differences... forge some idea of common identity... communism... new tendencies of ‘tolerance’ and spiritual relativism.

Our Need – to discover the common in the midst of the unique... not a bland conformity... but unity amidst diversity.

> The fundamental truth is that our differences don't divide when they are centered and secured in the common bonds that connect us.

> Which is precisely what God has at hand....

Colossians 1:19-20 (TEV)

For it was by God's own decision that the Son has in himself the full nature of God.

Through the Son, then, God decided to bring the whole universe back to himself. God made

peace through his Son's blood on the cross and so brought back to himself all things, both on earth and in heaven.

God has come to reconcile everyone in Christ.

Hebrews 2:11 (NLT)

“So now Jesus and the ones he makes holy have the same Father. That is why Jesus is not ashamed to call them his brothers and sisters.”

It may be awkward...but it is an awkward reality. Too often we think we belong only if we initially fit in...or we have a wonderful communal experience. But unity is a reality that is waiting for us to realize.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, in his book "Life Together", describes the privilege of Christian fellowship.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer

"Christian brotherhood is not an ideal which we must realize; it is rather a reality created by God in Christ in which we may participate.

We must not look for some extraordinary social experience...must not confuse Christian brotherhood with some wishful idea of religious fellowship...it's not an ideal, but a divine reality...a spiritual, not psychic reality...When the morning mists of dreams vanish, then dawns the bright day of Christian fellowship."

This is why in every step we take to gather...I feel confident in two things: it will be awkward...and it will be good...ultimately good.

It was wonderful this past Thursday...to see CNN riveted by **Pope Francis...**and as he spoke at the cathedral in Washington DC... he spoke on the first words of the Lord's Prayer... stating:

“When we say “Father”...we learn to see one another as brothers or sisters.”

He concluded. “Today...I want to be one with you. I need your support...your closeness. Together we can know the joy that Jesus is in our midst.”

If we are going to respond to God's call... it will usually mean acing some barriers within ourselves...

- **Individualism**

Many of us long for community... but have never given up our individualism.

Individuality is from God... but not individualism.

Individuality reflects the beauty of diversity... but diversity that is lived within the common life of being God's people.

Individualism is a way of life that makes the individual supreme or sovereign over everything.

This is very different from healthy individuation

Individuation reflects the nature of discovering that we are individual... connected and yet separate. The tragedy is that the soul is no longer returning to a defining common bond and is often left adrift.

Individuation is never being completed... and the result is an individualism that we may find easy because it demands nothing ... but excludes us from real life. Individualism is separation without connection. We're becoming dictators of a one-person country... our own gods... only to discover the world we rule is isolated and dark.

- **Insecurity... and false sources of worth...and superiority**

Let's be honest... some people in this God family are weird. (Don't look around.) Some may say strange things. You may feel that some lack your good senses...your good looks...your success at life.

Our restoration comes when we dare to face our own false sources of worth....because they can be false attachments that keep us from seeing the real and equal worth in others.

CS Lewis, who was one of the most esteemed men of literature at Oxford University... found this challenge as he came to believe in Jesus amidst his academic and often arrogant world.

“When I first became a Christian, about fourteen years ago, I thought that I could do it on my own, by retiring to my rooms and reading theology, and I wouldn't go to the churches and Gospel Halls; ...I disliked very much their hymns, which I considered to be fifth-rate poems set to sixth-rate music. But as I went on I saw the great merit of it. I came up against different people of quite different outlooks and different education, and then gradually my conceit just began peeling off. I realized that the hymns (which were just sixth-rate music) were, nevertheless, being sung with devotion and benefit by an old saint in elastic-side boots in the opposite pew, and then you realize that you aren't fit to clean those boots. It gets you out of your solitary conceit.”

Ask yourself....what do you find security and significance in? It could be your looks...your success...your work.

What allows us to feel secure and significant is what we most often judge others by. What we find our sense of worth in, is often “coverings” that can keep us from seeing the real and equal worth of others.

We are bound as a...

2. A transformational community... restoring our true identity

We don't just meet to belong...or escape loneliness...; we are not a new social club. We are gathered by Jesus...and to Jesus.

Jesus is calling us out from who we have thought we were...to restore our nature as created by God.

His words speak change. The Spirit is at work... forming that nature in us... “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.” (Galatians 5:22-23, ESV)

Hebrews 10:24-25 (TEV)

Let us be concerned for one another, to help one another to show love and to do good. Let us not give up the habit of meeting together, as some are doing. Instead, let us encourage one another all the more, since you see that the Day of the Lord is coming nearer.

The writer had seen the consequences of developing connections and not having them.

A healthy believer is a healthy belonger.

Henry Cloud, a Christian psychologist, wrote this in his wonderful book titled How People Grow;

Dr. Henry Cloud

As people are cut off from others and their souls are starved for connectedness, the need for love turns into an insatiable hunger for something. It can be a substance, sex, food, shopping, or gambling, but these never satisfy, because the real need is for connection to God and others, and to God through others. When people receive that, the power of addiction is broken.

We need connection.

This is hard... we often are afraid...afraid of being judged...afraid of feeling discouraged (because many of our struggles are repetitive)...and ultimately...afraid of ourselves.

As one asked: “How can I be one with you when I am divided within myself?”

We need grace to grow...

We need to get comfortable with the need to grow...to become honest with ourselves...and then find freedom to become real with others who can speak into our lives.

We need those who are rooted in grace. [10]

How much do you want to grow?

We are bound as a...

3. A missional community... restoring our redemptive role

We never gather as an end in itself.

Whenever Jesus said “come”...it would lead to his saying “go.”

There is a restoring power...as we were created to experience our lives as joined with what God was doing.

From the start God gave human life purpose... but the enemy of our souls deceived us into thinking we could find our own.

The **same who came as a serpent**... came to Jesus in the **desert (tempted Jesus with what? ... an alternative purpose)**

> **He comes to the desert of our souls... to steal our purpose.**

> If we can be **drawn out into the autonomy**... into the **wilderness of self**... **then we've entered the enemy's self consuming way of life... and his fate.**

Jesus – “Follow me and I will make you fishers of men.”... “You are the light of the world... salt of the earth...”... and sent them to proclaim and demonstrate the Kingdom reign of God.

Divine Community is rooted in a common CAUSE.

Randy Frazee

“The principle of sharing a common purpose is ... simply not optional if you want true community. When you come across a place of community that truly works, you will discover that they share a common mission that is larger than any one person.” [12]

> **We were shaped** to be a part of **something bigger than ourselves**... a common cause that unites us.

Closing: If you didn't notice this before...there is an empty chair here on the side of the stage. In previous small groups... we would add an empty chair once we got started. The chair was there to remind us that someone was not here...to draw our hearts and prayers toward those not yet with us. That is the heart of being a missional community.

Let's pray.

Notes:

1a. One of core values of the Vineyard as a movement of churches is to be a reconciling community. ...”committed to being communities of healing, engaged in the work of reconciliation wherever sin and evil hold sway....seeking to be diverse communities of hope....who move beyond our personal preferences and engage those whom we perceive to be unlike us. We must actively work to break down barriers of race, culture, gender, social class, and ethnicity. (Vineyard USA Core Value: Reconciling Community)

1b. Many have noted what they deem the over-use of the word “community.” It is a difficult word to apply because while it may imply actual relationships...it more broadly can be used to refer to any group that has something in “common.” In this way one can speak of “the blind community”...the Muslim community”...the physics community.” These communities have no relationship...simply something they share in common.

Some articles on the current use of the word:

1c. Drew from Rich Nathan message on January 12, 2014; Vineyard Core series. Also includes ...

“There’s a famous Harvard study regarding what makes people happy. The Harvard study is, I believe, the longest running study of individuals ever conducted. The study began in 1938 and it followed over 250 Harvard undergrads for 75 years. They followed up with each of these graduates year after year, did psychological testing with them, physical testing. They examined people’s habits. They followed people for 75 years and tried to figure out what makes people thrive. What leads to human happiness and human thriving? After 75 years of study, here is their conclusion: The single factor that leads to health and happiness in old age is warm relationships. The chief investigator in this study was convinced that what matters most in life in terms of human thriving and human happiness is warm relationships.”

2. Similar statements regarding social media:

“An open Facebook page is simply a psychiatric dry erase board that screams, “Look at me. I am insecure. I need your reaction to what I am doing, but you’re not cool enough to be my friend. Therefore, I will just pray you see this because the approval of God is not all I need.”

— [Shannon L. Alder](#)

3. While not stated as such, this quote is my own.

4. Could also add: Winona Ryder was considered the most successful young actresses not long ago...and she describes what she faced...

"When I was 18, I was driving around at two in the morning, completely crying and alone and scared. I drove by this magazine stand that had this *Rolling Stone* that I was on the cover of, and it said, 'Winona Ryder: The Luckiest Girl in the World.' And there I was feeling more alone than I ever had."

Citation: Winona Ryder, cited from *Plugged In*, Vol. 6, no. 4 (April 2001); submitted by Van Morris, Mount Washington, Kentucky

5. Citation: Interview magazine (10-01-98); submitted by Mike Herman, Glen Ellyn, Illinois

6. Citation: Anthony Bozza, "The Fragile World of Trent Reznor," *Rolling Stone* (10-14-99), p. 140

6b. In regards to loneliness being a spiritual issue, we could also note:

According to Genesis 1, God created the universe and everything in it. And seven times in Genesis 1 God creates something and calls it good. Of all the numbers that carry significance in the Bible, the #7 is important because it is used to signify completeness, or totality. God looks out on the universe that he made and 7 times says, “It is good.” The first time we hear God saying that something is not good is in Genesis 2:18,

The LORD God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.” Genesis 2:18 (NIV)

God sees every one of our lives...and he sees varying degrees of loneliness...isolation.

7. It's been noted that the diversity becomes greater as the call to Gentiles and the whole world spreads. In Acts 13:1 we see these five leaders of Antioch of Church:

Barnabus – Jewish Levite from Crete (priestly)

Simon – black African...maybe one who carried Christ's cross

Lucius – Roman from Cyrene Libya (Greek Gentile)

Manion – childhood friend of King Herod...a pagan Gentile past

Saul – A Jewish Pharisee

The early church didn't just preach good news...it was good news.

8. From Preaching the Gospel of Matthew: Proclaiming God's Presence, By Stanley P. Saunder, p. 77

9. Dietrich Bonhoeffer in "Life Together", also says:

"Christ is the basis of our fellowship, the source and center. "Not what a man is in himself as a Christian, his spirituality and piety, constitutes the basis of our community. What determines our brotherhood is what that man is by reason of Christ." (p. 25)

"We must not look for some extraordinary social experience...must not confuse Christian brotherhood with some wishful idea of religious fellowship...it's not an ideal, but a divine reality...a spiritual, not psychic reality." (p. 26)

"When the morning mists of dreams vanish, then dawns the bright day of Christian fellowship." (p. 29)+

10. Leadership Mag...Summer 1996...has great interview with prominent men who were in an accountability type group. SCOTTY SMITH, SCOTT ROLEY, MICHAEL CARD

S. Smith - "The pain of love is stronger than the pain of legalism." Accountability should just be a subset of good friendship."

M. Card - "One thing community does is it gives us a face" (i.e., to answer too).

S. Smith - *"We're not watchdogs; we're watchmen: And there's a big difference."*

11. One more thought about the spiritual need for connection. What you become will be determined by who you hang around with. Proverbs 13:20 says this:

Proverbs 13:20 (NIV)

Walk with the wise and become wise, for a companion of fools suffers harm.

We see people in the Bible making very foolish choices about their relationships and being spiritually ruined by them. A great example from the Old Testament is Samson. He surrounded himself with friends who didn't know the Lord and was pulled down spiritually

by those friends. Proverbs says becoming wise means that you are careful about who you choose to spend a lot of time with. Because who you pick to spend time with, and who you pick for your intimate friends, is going to shape the kind of person you are.

12. This is developed well in “The Connecting Church 2.0: Beyond Small Groups to Authentic Community By Randy Frazee”

13. One beautiful story not used which can serve as a call to reach out and take a risk in reconciling, is the door of reconciliation in Dublin.

RECONCILIATION DOOR

In St. Patrick's Cathedral in Dublin, Ireland, is displayed a 500-year-old door with a hole in it. The door is hung so that it can be seen from both sides and there is a plaque that identifies it as the Door of Reconciliation.

The story behind this door and the phrase attached to it is that, in 1492 there was an ongoing bloody, feud between two prominent Irish families, the Ormonds and the Kildares. During a confrontation in Dublin, the Earl of Ormond, James Butler, along with several of his men, took refuge in the Chapter House of St. Patrick's Cathedral, behind this very door. Butler's enemy, Gerald Fitzgerald, the Earl of Kildare, stood on the other side of the door. Fitzgerald decided, in his desire to end the bloodshed, to make a peace offering. To prove his good intentions and honor, he ordered his soldiers to cut a hole through the door and then bravely, “chanced his arm” by thrusting it through the hole in the offer of a handshake of friendship. In doing so, he risked having his arm sliced off by Butler and his men. However, Butler magnanimously accepted this offer of reconciliation and with a handshake through the hole in the door, the feud was ended, ...both men were able to live in peace.

This led to the phrase “chancing the arm” that became common in Ireland.

In the notes about the door at the cathedral is a reminder that Jesus Christ is God's Arm of Reconciliation that reaches through the barrier of our sin. God extends His arm to you for reconciliation

“Who has believed our message? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?”
– [Isa. 53:1](#)

We too are called to extend ourselves... to “chance the arm.” Jesus said, "You're blessed when you can show people how to cooperate instead of compete or fight. That's when you discover who you really are, and your place in God's family." (Matt. 5:9 [The Message])

Will we “chance our arm” for others?

[Picture of the famous [Door Of Reconciliation](#) in St. Patrick's Cathedral, where Gerald FitzGerald "chanced his arm" 500 years ago.]