

WEEK 4: THE GROUP FACTOR (COMMUNITY)
Why We Need Each Other

"Since we are all one body in Christ, we belong to each other, and each of us needs all the others." Romans 12:5b (NLT)

1. I NEED OTHERS TO _____ WITH ME.

"Just as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him..." Colossians 2:6-7 (ESV)

"It is not good for man to be alone." Gen. 2:18 (NLT)

"Let us not give up the habit of meeting together... Instead, let us encourage one another."
Hebrews 10:25a (TEV)

- Community is God's answer to: _____

"When you gather, each one of you be prepared with something useful for all: Sing a hymn, teach a lesson, tell a story, lead a prayer, provide an insight... Take your turn, with no one person taking over. That way... you all learn from each other."
1 Corinthians 14:26, 30-31 (MSG)

"As each part does its work, it helps the other parts grow, so Christ's whole body is healthy and growing and full of love." Ephesians 4:16 (NLT)

"Open your homes to each other without complaining." 1 Peter 4:9 (TEV)

2. I NEED OTHERS TO _____ WITH ME.

"God made us to do good works, which He planned in advance for us to live our lives doing."
Ephesians 2:10 (NCV)

"Two people are better than one, because they get more done by working together."
Ecclesiastes 4:9 (NCV)

- Community is God's answer to: _____

"Every time we get the chance, let us work for the benefit of all, starting with the people closest to us in the community of faith." Galatians 6:10 (MSG)

3. I NEED OTHERS TO _____ FOR ME.

"Look out for one another's interests, not just for your own." Philippians 2:4 (TEV)

"Keep being concerned about each other as the Lord's followers should." Hebrews 13:1 (CEV)

"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)

- Community is God's answer to: _____

"If one person falls, another can reach out and help. But people who are alone when they fall are in real trouble." Ecclesiastes 4:10 (NLT)

4. I NEED OTHERS TO _____ WITH ME.

"You should be like one big family, full of sympathy toward each other..." 1 Peter 3:8a (LB)

"If one member suffers, all suffer together." 1 Corinthians 12:26 (ESV)

- Community is God's answer to: _____

"Be happy with those who are happy, weep with those who weep." Romans 12:15 (TEV)

"Encourage each other and strengthen one another." 1 Thessalonians 5:11 (GW)

5. I NEED OTHERS TO _____ WITH ME.

"Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are My disciples." John 13:35 (NLT)

"The Holy Spirit doesn't want you to be afraid of people, but to be wise and strong, and to love them and enjoy being with them." 2 Timothy 1:7 (LB)

- God's answer to fear is _____

"...You are working together and struggling side by side to get others to believe the Good News." Philippians 1:27b (CEV)

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Why We Need Each Other

Today is the beginning of a revolution. It's going to start with a very radical counter-culture message. What I want to talk to you about this morning is the exact opposite of what you've been taught most of your life. But God promises that if you'll do this, if you'll do it *His*, way that you'll never again have to struggle with loneliness. You'll be able to overcome things like fatigue and fear and frustration and failure. That if you'll do what He talks about you'll be able to handle depression and despair and have that replaced with hope. It is the concept of community.

As Americans we idolize independence. In America we have the Declaration of Independence. We like songs like "I've Got to Be Me," "I'll Do It My Way," I don't need anybody to tell me what it's all about. We honor the Lone Ranger. We love the Lone Ranger. Of course, even the Lone Ranger had Tonto, but we like the idea of being totally independent. We have bought into a myth that says that the key to happiness is independence.

If I have relational independence, financial independence, independence in every other area of my life, if I don't let anybody get too close to me but I'm totally self-sufficient, then I will be happy. And yet every year the suicide rate tends to rise. Obviously, that's not true. God says that the key to happiness is not independence but inter-dependence. We need each other. We belong to each other. We need community in our lives. God wired you to go through life not as a solitary individual but in community.

The Bible says in Romans 12, *"Since we are all one body in Christ, we belong to each other, and each of us needs all the others."* We need each other. God says community is not optional. You may not feel it. You may feel like "I'm very self-sufficient. I don't need other people in my life." But the truth is you absolutely have to have other people in your life if you're going to be all God wants you to be.

Today I want us to start a journey on an even bigger idea. That is you cannot fulfill God's purposes for your life by yourself. There's no way. There's no way you can be all God wants you to be, do all God wants you to do, fulfill the purposes that you were put on this planet to fulfill by yourself. You have to do it in relationship to other people. We need each other and we belong to each other in the body of Christ.

We're going to focus on the greatest lesson in life. That is, learning how to love. Why do relationships go bad? How do you turn a bad relationship into a good one? What is it that God does when He uses other people in our lives and how does He do it to make us what He wants us to be? So we're going to discuss and discover what it really means to develop true, intimate relationships.

We're going to look at why we need each other. Why we need God's family, specifically, the five reasons God says you need other people in your life and why you need a small group.

1. I need others to walk with me.

What does that mean? It means I need you to help me grow spiritually. Colossians 2:6-7 says, *"Just as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him."* Did you know that the Bible often compares life to a walk? Why? Because you're on a journey. You don't just sit still in life. You're not where you used to be. You're not where you're going to be. You're on a journey. So it calls the spiritual life, the Christian life, a walk. Throughout the New Testament, we're told to walk in wisdom, to walk in love, to walk in light. We're told to walk in obedience, in the Spirit, walk as Jesus walked. Many, many other ways the Bible tells us that we are to live life.

But one of the key ways that God tells us to walk is this: you were never meant to walk through life alone. This has nothing to do with whether you're single or married. Nothing at all. We have thousands of single adults in our church who are very involved in deep, intimate, meaningful community. We also have married couples in our church who are desperately lonely. Marriage does not solve the issue. Community does.

Some of you say, "What's wrong with walking alone? I like waking alone. In fact, I prefer it. I can go at my own pace, my own speed. I don't have to wait for anybody. Whatever. I like walking alone." You may like it but you need others to walk with you.

Let me give you three reasons.

1. It's safer. Walking through life with other people in your life is safer. It's less risky. Have you ever had to walk through a dark alley at night in the inner city by yourself? It's a little scary. Or a walk down a long road in the countryside by yourself. It can be scary. It's safer to walk through life with others.

2. It's supportive. What I mean by that is it keeps you from giving up. When you're walking with other people you get the energy to keep on going that you wouldn't have. Have you ever been in a marathon where you're running this marathon and you start getting a stitch in your side, a little pain there and you want to give up. That usually happens to me about mile 20! You start going, I can't go on. I'm not going to be able to do this. I want to give up. But if you have other people walking with you, you can keep on going.

There's an old Zambian proverb that says, "When you run alone you run fast. But when you run together you run far." Good words. Life is not a 50-yard dash. It is a marathon. You want to make it to the end of life. The only way you're going to make it to the end of life the way God wants you to is by having other people involved in your life.

If you've ever watched in the fall when a flock of geese are flying south and they're in "V" formation. Do you know why they do that? Because it creates an uplift in the back draft and it makes it easier and they can fly farther and longer when they fly together.

The same is true in your life. You're going to burn out in life if you go through it without any meaningful intimate relationships. It's safer. It's supportive. Not only that but...

3. It's smarter. It's just smarter to go through life with a few really close deep friends. You learn more by walking with others than you do by yourself. Proverbs 28:26 says, *"Only fools trust in what they alone think."* In other words, if I'm the only one who thinks this and nobody else agrees with me, guess what? I'm wrong. You may be walking in the wrong direction. But if you're walking by yourself through life you don't have anybody to go, "We're off the path. We missed it. We've got to get back on the path." The Bible tells us, *"In a multitude of counselors there is safety."*

One of the things that's very important that you learn when you walk with others is you learn how to get along with other people. If you go through life isolated, never let anybody get close to you, never cooperate with anybody you don't learn how to cooperate. And that's one of the great lessons of life. Have you noticed when you walk with somebody else everybody walks at a different pace? Different style. Those of you who are married have you ever tried to walk with your husband or your wife around the lake. It's different. Different strides. Different strokes for different folks. So we have to learn to compromise.

The Bible says this in Genesis 2:18, *"It is not good for man to be alone."* That's the first thing God said after He created Adam. He looked down at a perfect environment, the Garden of Eden, and said, "It's not good. It's not good for man to be alone." God hates loneliness. He hates it. God hates loneliness.

So what's His antidote? He created two groups. Physical family and a spiritual family. The physical family is the one you grew up in. The spiritual family is the one you have the rest of your life. It goes on in to eternity. The physical family eventually moves apart, eventually dies and doesn't go on. But the spiritual family, God's church, is going to go on forever and ever and ever. So God says I want you to be connected in My family, the church.

Hebrews 10, *"Let us not give up the habit of meeting together..."* [notice it's a habit. It's something you do all the time] *Instead, let us encourage one another."* He says you're created for community and I want you to encourage each other by meeting together.

That verse is not talking about what we're doing right now. This is not community, folks. This is crowd! It's a quite large crowd. We can't encourage each other here. You can't even get to talk to very many people. There's just too many people. This can only be done in small group. Can you be in a crowd and be lonely? Sure. So it has nothing to do with the size. It's talking about getting together with people who encourage you.

Community is God's answer to loneliness. We all need a place where we can practice love. It's what the world needs. We need to learn how to love. So we're going to begin a revolution of love today.

The Bible says that I've got to have other people in my life as I'm walking through life. I need other people to grow. I can't grow without others. The Bible is very clear about this. I cannot grow without other people in my life. Why? Because life is about relationships not about achievement. God is love and He wants me to learn to love Him and to love others. Those are the two greatest lessons in life.

The Bible gets very specific about this. 1 Corinthians 14, I love this in the Message paraphrase. It's pretty clear. *"When you gather, each one of you be prepared with something useful for all. Sing a hymn, teach a lesson, tell a story, lead a prayer, provide an insight... Take your turn, with no one person taking over. That way you all learn from each other."*

Does that sound like something we do here on Sunday morning? No. I don't stand up here and say, "Anybody got a poem? What happened to you this week? Who has a prayer request? Who learned something from God this week? Who needs to be prayed for?" We're too big to do that. This can only happen in a small group. That's why to be a healthy believer you need large group worship and small group fellowship. Temple courts and house to house. That's why in our church we ask everybody to come on a weekend service and be in a small group. If you're only getting half of that you're only getting half the benefit of this church. You need to walk through life in a small group of believers.

Why? Ephesians 4, *"As each part [talking about the body of Christ] does its work, it helps the other parts grow, so Christ's whole body is healthy and growing and full of love."* That's what God wants in your life and He wants it for all of us. He wants us to be healthy and growing and full of love. That's my prayer for you as your pastor. I want you to be healthy and I want you to be growing and I want you to be full of love. There's only one way you can do that. You've got to get with other Christians to walk through life with you.

You can't learn community without being in a community. Not a crowd but in a community.

The Bible says this in 1 Peter 4:9, *"Open your homes to each other without complaining."* What's your complaint? What's your excuse for not opening up your home? "My home is dirty!" Clean it up! That's a real easy thing. "My home isn't big enough." Can you put three people in it? Then you can have a group.

The Bible says, *"Where two or more are gathered in My name, I'm there in the midst of them."* You say, "I don't like my neighbors." Don't invite them! I'm not telling you to invite people you don't like. Invite the people you do like. Invite your friends. Invite your coworkers, your family. You say, "Nobody would want to come to my house and study this." Really? Everybody has a longing for belonging. Everybody. Deep in the human spirit is a longing for belonging. It's why

the worst kind of punishment is solitary confinement. We're made for relationships. God wired us that way. That's why people will join all kinds of stupid causes just because they want to belong. The people in your neighborhood would love to come to your house.

Community is God's answer to loneliness.

2. I also need others to work with me.

I need people to work with me. The Bible says God put you on earth to do a certain work that only you can do. Ephesians 2:10 says this: *"God made us to do good works, which He planned in advance for us to live our lives doing."* Before you were even born God decided the talents that He was going to give you. The natural abilities He was going to give you. The background. He even chose where you would be born, who your parents would be, when you would be born, and all of this. Because He has a purpose for your life and part of that purpose is He has some work for you to do.

Anytime you use your talents or your abilities to help somebody else there's a word for that. It's called *ministry*, or service. All of us are ministers. Not pastors – ministers. What that means is when you use your gifts and what God wired you to be to help others, you're doing what God wants you to do. He says these are your good works.

Remember, we've talked about this many times. Life on earth is practice for eternity. You get a hundred years at the most on earth, you get trillions of years in heaven. In heaven you're going to do four things and one of the things you're going to do in heaven is you're going to serve God. So what God wants you to do while you're here on earth is spend some of that time practicing. Practicing serving. He says I want you to learn to serve. I want you to do these good works. But I don't want you to do them by yourself.

In heaven, when you get there everybody's got to work. But we'll all just have a little piece so you'll never get tired. You're not going to be overworked or overloaded in heaven because God will give you just a little piece to do. But everybody will do their part and it will all get done.

What happens here on earth though is you're worn out. You're exhausted. You're burned out. Some of you came to church exhausted. Why? Because you're trying to do it all and you're trying to do it all by yourself. That's why you're worn out. God never meant for you to go through life walking alone or working alone. You need to be in relationship with others who help you get done what you need to do. Otherwise you're going to be worn out and fatigued all the time.

God tells us in the Bible why we're supposed to work together. Ecclesiastes 4, *"Two people are better than one, because they get more done by working together."* They get more done by working together! Everybody knows this. You always get more done as a team than you do as an

individual. It's also a whole lot more fun. It's also less tiring. You learn to cooperate together. There's all kinds of benefits to working together.

Some people fall for what I call the Mother Teresa syndrome. That's the idea that the lone person goes out to change the world all by themselves. Even Mother Teresa didn't even do that. She had an army of people helping her. Other sisters in Sisters of Charity who were helping her. You've heard me say before, snowflakes are frail but if enough of them stick together they can stop traffic.

Individually, I can't make that big a difference in the world. And individually you can't make that big of difference in the world. But together... in this church we've got 82,000 snowflakes! That's a lot of snow. And that can make some significant difference. Together we can make a difference if everybody does just a little.

Community is God's answer to fatigue. If you're tired it's because you don't have the relationships built in to support you that you need in what God has called you to do. Have you ever watched on TV or the movie *Witness* where the Amish build a barn together? They do it in a day. The whole community shows up and where there was nothing, at the end of the day there's a barn standing. How? Everybody has a little part to play.

The Bible says this in Galatians 6:10, *"Every time we get the chance, let us work for the benefit of all, [I need others to work with me] starting with the people closest to us in the community of faith."* What's the community of faith? It's our church family.

I need people to walk with me through life and I need people to work with me through life, but also...

3. I need others to watch out for me in life.

I'm talking about people who'll defend me, stand up for me, protect me. Who will help me keep staying on track, watch my backside, warn me. We all need this because we all have blind spots. The Bible says in Philippians 2:4, *"Look out for one another's interest, not just your own."* If you want a counter culture verse, that's it. In America, the general idea is it's all about me. It's all about my needs, my interest, my wants, my desires, my ambitions. The rest of you, forget you! I live for myself. Forget everybody else. This verse says don't just look out for your own interest, look out for others too.

Have you ever seen these Neighborhood Watch signs? Sometimes you see them out in an area. That's a sign of community. It says we watch out for each other here. We're looking out for each other. My guess is if you went on vacation this summer, you were gone for a week, maybe two weeks, you probably told your neighbor you were going to be gone. You said, "I'm going to be gone for a couple weeks. Would you kind of keep an eye out on my house? Look out for my

stuff.” We all want our stuff looked out for! That’s a good thing to have your stuff looked after, watched out for.

But my question is not is anybody watching out for your stuff. It’s is anybody watching out for your soul. Your soul is a whole lot more important than your stuff. Is there anybody in your life who helps you stay on track spiritually? Is there anybody who loves you enough to say, “I’m not going to let you get discouraged. I’m not going to let you drop out. I’m not going to let you get tired. I’m here with you. Let me support you.” And they encourage you in your spiritual life. If you don’t have anybody like that, that’s sad.

The fact is we all have blind spots. Things we can’t see.

You get a tail light out. You’re never going to know it. Somebody’s got to look out for you. Somebody’s got to say, “You’ve got a tail light out!” Hopefully somebody tells you when you’re unzipped! Friends, we’re family here! If I’m ever unzipped, tell me! Don’t let me go through the whole service! Stand up and say, “Pastor!” Friends don’t let friends get tacos in their teeth. Or a little bugger. That’s what people who care about you do. They say, “You’ve got a bugger! Get that thing out!” We need to watch out for each other because there’s some stuff we just can’t see.

The Bible says in Hebrews 13:1, *“Keep being concerned about each other as the Lord’s followers should.”* We should care about each other. We’re family. We’re in God’s family. As brothers and sisters, I should defend you and you should defend me and I help you stay on track and you help me stay on track.

It says, “keep being concerned.” Circle “keep.” That means not just once. You’re vigilant. In a war everybody has to take time on sentry duty. While everybody else is sleeping somebody stays awake and makes sure the enemy isn’t crashing in.

Since 9/11, we’ve all been a whole lot more vigilant for each other with terrorism and things like that. But did you know that you have an enemy far more destructive than terrorists? Oh, yes! You have a personal enemy. And he hates your guts. He wants to defeat you. His name is Satan. Satan wants to mess up your life. Satan wants to bring problems into your life. Satan wants to ruin your relationships. He wants to hurt you as bad as he can.

Why would he do that? Because he can’t hurt God. What Satan wants to do is hurt God, but he can’t. When you can’t hurt somebody what do you do? You go after their children. If you couldn’t get to me, you’d go after my wife or my kids. Satan can’t hurt God. So what does he do? He tries to hurt God’s children. He doesn’t care what it will take, how badly you get hurt. He wants to mess you up anyway. The moment you wake up in the morning he’s already been plotting how to get you to waste that day, to blow it with anger or worry or fear or guilt or shame or depression. Or any other resentment or bitterness. He’ll just try to get you all messed up.

I've been reading this 9/11 report from the commission. It's interesting reading, but as I read it, I thought what are the parallels here between our battle, our spiritual battle against Satan. Listen to this parallel – this is what the commission reported: “We learned about an enemy who was sophisticated, patient, disciplined, and lethal. [That’s exactly what the devil is.] The enemy rallies broad support by redressing political grievance but its hostility toward us and our values is limitless. [And Satan’s hatred of you is limitless.] Its purpose is to rid the world of religious pluralism. It makes no distinction between military and civilian targets; collateral damage is not in its lexicon. [Satan doesn’t care who gets hurt. He just wants to hurt.] We learned that we did not understand how grave this threat could be.

So we did not adjust our plans and practices to deter or defeat it. [If that doesn’t describe most Christians...! We don't realize the war we're in so we don't make any plans to handle temptation.] The test before us now is to sustain the unity of purpose [I could have written this stuff!] and meet the challenges now confronting us. We need to design a balanced strategy for the long haul to attack terrorists while at the same time protecting ourselves against future attack.” We not only have to protect ourselves. We have to go after them. That’s what it says in the Bible. *“The gates of hell will not prevail against us.”* Gates are defensive. You’re going after the devil, not vice versa.

When Satan attacks you, he doesn’t come in a little red costume and a pitchfork and say, “Boo!” How does Satan mess up your life? Through habits you can’t break, through hurts that you won’t let go of and you hold on to the resentment, through hang-ups you can’t change in your life, through problems and circumstances, through relationships that break your heart and hurt you. He always works around and through others. Most Christians are defeated. They live in defeat. Why? Because we try to fight him on our own. And that’s stupid. You’re never going to win against the devil on your own. You need other people who will watch out for you and help you.

Ecclesiastes 4:12, *“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.”* That’s a small group. He says you watch out for each other.

Last year about this time I walked across a maximum-security prison yard in Northern California. Two thousand inmates in that yard. And I walked across it with no guard protecting me, no gun, no weapon, no body armor. Just myself. And I was not afraid. Why? Because I had a group of other inmates, about 30 of them, who were Christians in front of me, behind me and on either side of me. If anybody wanted to get at me, they were going to have to get through these guys who had these tattoos that said, “Mom” and “Jesus.” There’s no way I felt worried. These guys were there to protect me.

Here’s my question. Is there anybody watching your backside? Anybody who’s watching out for your spiritual welfare? Do you have anybody close like that? Are you in a small group where that group of guys if you’re a guy or women if you’re a woman, who are saying, “We’re there when you’re going through the tough times. We’re not going to let you get discouraged. We’re

not going to let you get depressed. We're not going to let you get worried. We're going to be here with you." If you don't have anybody like that, I pity you. You've got a big bullseye on your back for Satan. It's like, "Here's a loner. They're not connected. They're not in a group."

I know this is hard to believe, but when I was young I was a lifeguard for three summers. Actually, they fired me because every time I'd see a hand I'd go, "Yes, I see that hand. God bless you! Yes, God bless you. Yes. Many are raising their hands!" *I made that part up.* But I was a lifeguard. Everybody knows you never go swimming by yourself in the ocean. You might catch a riptide. You never go by yourself.

Did you read about this kid who was an experienced climber a couple months ago? He's climbing a mountain, slipped and fell, fell into a ravine and got his arm caught. And he couldn't get out. He would have died there because he was by himself. He thought he knew enough to go it on his own. The only way he broke free was he had to cut his own arm off. Or die. Even the pros need a buddy.

Community is God's answer to defeat. The Bible says in Ecclesiastes 4:10, "*If one person falls, another can reach out and help. But people who are alone when they fall are in real trouble.*" All groups are based on this principle. You got something in your life you can't get control of, I guarantee it. I have never yet met a single person who doesn't have something in their life they'd like to change but have been unable to change. You're never going to be able to change it on your own. If you could have, you would have but you can't, so you won't. So you need other people. Some problems in our life only get solved by team tackling together. I need people to walk with me and work with me and watch out for me.

4. I need others to wait with me and to weep with me.

To wait and weep. I'm talking about they wait while I'm waiting for the bad news. And they weep when I get the bad news. I need people with me in the inevitable crises of life, when the tragedies hit. I don't want to face that alone.

As your pastor, I especially feel this one. I see it on a daily basis. There are situations that nobody should ever have to go through alone. Nobody should ever have to wait in the hospital while a loved one is in a life or death surgery. Nobody. No woman should ever have to wait alone waiting for the lab report back on a problem pregnancy. Nobody. Nobody should have to wait for news from a battlefield alone. Nobody should have to stand at the edge of an open grave alone. Nobody should have to wait at home alone for the coroner to come and publicly identify the body of a loved one who just died. Nobody. Nobody should have to spend the first night alone after their husband has died or wife has died. Nobody should ever have to spend the first night alone when their wife has just walked out. Or their husbands walked out.

The fact is some of these things are going to happen to you. They're inevitable. You're going to have loved ones die. You're going to go through tragedy. You're going to get bad health news.

You're going to find out one day that you are dying. You need other people in your life. Only a fool would go all the way through life totally unprepared for something that you know is inevitably going to happen. The time is now to build the safety net, the network of supportive friends. Get it in place now because at some point the tragedy is going to happen. You don't know when. The time to prepare is now.

What is God's safety net? It is a group of other believers. You don't need a hundred. You only need five or six. But it's a group of other believers who are committed to you.

The Bible says this in 1 Peter 3:8, *"You should be like one big family, full of sympathy toward each other."* When you're in the hospital you don't want the whole church to visit you. In fact, it'd be kind of bad if all of us came. But it would be nice to have four or five come see you and say we're praying for you.

I'll never forget. There was a guy who came to this church for seven years. He sat up in the bleachers. He came for seven years, never got involved in anything, never joined a small group. Just came to worship and left. Never even met anybody in the church. I'm the only person he ever knew. Never made any friends in the family. One day, he had a heart attack and got in the hospital. Then he got an infection and he was in for two weeks. I was out traveling around, speaking somewhere. I didn't even hear about it until I got back. When he got out of the hospital he came to the church and said, "I'm leaving the church." I said, Why? He said, "Because it's unfriendly. Nobody visited me in the hospital." I said, I'm sorry and he left. As he left I thought, *It's your fault.*

He never visited anybody in the hospital. He never cared about anybody but himself. He never cared enough to even meet anybody. He's going to die and go to heaven and meet somebody and say, "You were at Saddleback? I didn't know you were there." He never got in a group, never gave, never shared. It was his fault when the crisis came that nobody was there for him.

I've told you many times that I could not make it in life without my small group. Eight other people, plus my wife and I in our small group. This last year we've gone through practically every kind of family or personal crisis you can imagine. We've been there to wait for each other and to wait with each other and to weep with each other when we needed support.

Here's God's plan, 1 Corinthians 12, *"If one member suffers, all suffer together."* I read recently about a guy who died at home in his bed and nobody discovered it for two years. I thought how tragic! That a guy was not even missed for two years. Can you imagine the despair in that man's heart as he was dying in bed? Nobody should ever die alone. Nobody should ever have to go through that kind of despair.

Community is God's answer to despair. Romans 12:15 says, *"Be happy with those who are happy, and weep with those who weep."* We do that in the group. Somebody has a good thing a

promotion or celebration, a graduation, we party. We have a good time. We have fun. Somebody has a tough time, we weep with them.

By the way, a lot of times in groups and small groups, people won't know how to deal with tears. You'll be in a small group and someone starts crying, a tear comes down their cheek. Let me give you a little tip. A tear is always a sign it's time to stop and pray. That's what you do. Whenever there is a tear it's time to stop and pray.

Like, "Let's just stop right now and pray for Mary. She just got this news from her sister. Let's stop and pray for her right now." ... "Let's stop and pray for Bob right now. He has given 22 years of his life to this corporation and they just laid him off with one week's notice. And he's pretty devastated. Let's pray for Bob right now." That is the sign... you don't have to fix anybody's problem in your small group. They don't want you to fix it. They just want you to sympathize. When you're going through a crisis you don't want advice, you just want somebody to be there. Just sit there with them, silent, hold their hand, put an arm around their shoulder. Cry with them. Be there with them.

In fact, it's usually when we start talking we get in trouble. We give stupid advice and stuff like that. Just be there. Sit there with them and sometimes you sit in silence. 1 Thessalonians 5:11 says this: *"Encourage each other and strengthen one another."*

The fifth reason I need other people in my life is...

5. I need others to witness with me.

What do I mean by that? You have a life message that God wants you to share with the world. It's part of your mission. The Bible says God put you on earth to do a mission. There is great power in group witness. God never meant for you to do your mission alone. God would never send a soldier out by himself. He says we go out together.

What is the way you witness best to people who don't know the love of God? How do you witness best to them? God says it's by loving others in the family of God. Jesus said in John 13:35, *"Your love for one another [He didn't say for Me. Not for God. Not for Jesus] will prove to the world that you are My disciples."* What impresses the community the most? When Christians – believers – love each other. The one thing that proves to the world that you're in the family of God, that you've stepped across the line, that you're headed for heaven is that you love other people in the family of God. If you do not love other people in the family of God you've got every reason to doubt, "Am I in it?" Because that's one of the things. When you're truly in God's family you start loving others in God's family.

That's what impresses the community, *"See how they love."* That's what we want Saddleback to be known for. What impresses them is not our size, not our buildings, not our sermons, not our music, but that's the place where you get loved. That's where they love you. That's where it's

okay for a guy to stand up and go, "I've got a sex addiction." That's the place where it's okay for a woman to stand up and say, "I just lost my husband. He walked out on me." That's the place where you're not perfect but they love you still. That's what we want to be known for.

2 Timothy 1:7 says this: "*The Holy Spirit doesn't want you to be afraid of people, but to be wise and strong, and to love them and to enjoy being with them.*" And I'm going to add, "And invite them into your home." Enjoy being with them and invite them into your home.

We're going to do it together. God's answer to fear is community. Philippians 1:27 says, "*You are working together and struggling side by side to get others to believe the Good News.*" That verse has the two goals of what we're going to do. First, deepen community within our church. We all need each other. We need other believers to walk with us, to work with us, to watch over us, to weep with us and wait with us when we need to wait, and to witness with us. Say this, "I really, really, really need a group." That is your declaration of interdependence.

Of all the people that God could have chosen to be here at this time and this place He chose you. Why? Because He wants to use you. He brought you here because He wants you to be a leader in it. To be involved in it; and I don't want you sitting on the sidelines.

Prayer:

Father, it's time for the church to be the church. And it's time for a revolution of love and fellowship and community. Please begin it in our hearts. With all my heart, Lord, I know that our churches will start fulfilling God's purposes together. When that happens, we'll see a new reformation in the church and a new spiritual awakening in our country. And God, we need it!

Now you pray. Say, "Dear God, forgive me for the times I felt like I didn't need other people in my life. I want to be a part of what You're doing on earth through Your family, the church. I want to experience real community. I'm tired of superficial relationships. I want to learn to really love and be loved in a deeper way. I open up my life to You, Jesus Christ. Come into my life. Accept me into Your family. Thank You for this place to belong and grow. I don't want to be a passive follower any more. Today I commit to getting into a small group so I can learn about community. In Your name. Amen."