

IN CHRIST: IN COMMUNITY

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This document is essentially the working manuscript of the sermon, and I therefore ask that you would be gracious for any grammatical or syntactical errors or oddities that make occur. This is not an edited and revised paper, but simply my original set of notes formatted for the purposes of reading and studying. I have referenced the various works that many of my ideas came from in the footnotes, and in the works cited at the end. I highly encourage you to check out some or all of these works if you would like to dig deeper into the concepts explored throughout the sermon. As well, I have written several questions for reflection at the end of the document for your own reflection, and for small group discussion. If you have any questions, or would like to discuss something from the sermon in more depth, feel free to contact me at austinr@wachurch.us.

As I reflect on my search for community, I realize that in difficult and painful times, my tendency wasn't to move toward community, but to isolate myself. Now let me be clear with what I mean when I so isolate. Isolation is not simply being alone; the opposite of isolation isn't being with lots of people, the opposite of isolation is being vulnerable with people. There are a lot of people who very cleverly isolate themselves by being super social.

Isolation is the absence of deeply vulnerable and authentic relationships.

When my depression got really bad, most of the time what I would do isn't go lock myself in the bathroom and hide (although there was a lot of that). My first instinct was to work extra hard to put on a happy face to convince everyone that I was alright. Some of the times when I was most isolated in my life, were the times I was the most social.

But we all do this though, in some way or another. You want to know how I know that? The clearest sign for an isolated person is unhealthy coping mechanisms. A researcher by the name of Brené Brown has shown that Americans for the past couple generations have become the most in-debt, obese, addicted, and medicated cohort in U.S. history.¹

We all cope in one way or another. Maybe you stare a screen for hours on end playing video games, watching TV, or looking at social media. Maybe you start eating, and seem to have no control over when you stop; or you obsess about your body stop eating, or start working out excessively. Maybe when things get tough you instinctively go to the liquor cabinet. Maybe you flirt with the opposite gender in order to make yourself feel valuable. Maybe you're a performer,

¹ Watch Brené Brown's Ted Talk here:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iCvmsMzIF7o>

and you work non-stop to be the best at whatever it is that you do, and prove you are valuable. Maybe in order to feel better, you need to put another person down by gossiping about them. Or maybe you cope vicariously through your child by attempting to make them perfect in order to gain some sense of control over your life. We all have our unhealthy coping mechanisms, they just look different for each of us. And the more you need to do in order to cope with the stress and pain of your life, the more isolated you will become.

Because here's the truth. You cannot selectively numb certain emotions. You cannot numb painful emotions without numbing the positive one's as well. If you attempt to numb one emotion, you will numb them all. As a result, you cannot numb the pain of relationships, and have healthy thriving one's at the same time.

Why do we do this though? I believe it's because of one simple thing: shame.

Shame, at its core, is the fear of disconnection.²

It is the belief that if you really knew me, if you really knew the most secret parts of my soul, you wouldn't love me. And so hard times come along, and they expose who we really are. We discover that we aren't as strong as we thought we were. We discover that we're not as loving and forgiving as we thought we were. We discover that we're actually pretty unhealthy, and deal with difficult situations in pretty unhealthy ways. And we begin to believe that if people knew that I was really this weak, if people knew how unloving and unforgiving I am, if people knew what I'm doing to cope with this pain, if people really knew who I was, there's no way they could love me.

² Ibid

This is not what God had designed humans for. We were not created to isolate ourselves from one another, holding ourselves captive to feelings of shame. We were designed for deeply vulnerable and transparent relationships with our God and one another, where we constantly hear from our Father that we are worthy of love and belonging, and instill that same sense of worthiness in others. So today, we are going to discover God's plan for bringing humans out of isolation and shame, and into the fullness of relationship; both with God and with one another. And in order to do that, we have to start at the beginning. Actually, we have to start before the beginning.

Genesis 1:1 states **"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth."** Well, what about before the beginning? Before God created, what was? Genesis 1:2 goes on to say **"The earth was formless and void, and darkness was over the surface of the deep, and *the Spirit of God* was hovering over the surface of the waters."** We get a hint here. There's God and then there's this Spirit of God, who seems to be God himself, but also distinct in some way. And after this God begins to speak creation into being, and into order.

Now John, one of the twelve disciples of Jesus, later on interpreted this speaking that God is doing here in Genesis 1 as also God himself, yet distinct in some manner. He writes **"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being."**³ Later on, John makes it clear that the Word he is referring to here is the person Jesus Christ, in the beginnings of time when God began his creative work. And throughout the rest of the New Testament, this new understanding of God begins to emerge.

³ John 1:1-3

God is one: Christians and Jews remain monotheistic, meaning belief in a single God. But as well, in some way beyond human comprehension, **God is also three.** And so, Christian tradition has come to understand God as what we call Trinity: which means one essence, yet three persons, all indivisible from one another, yet not to be confused. And we call these three persons of the Trinity the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

What does all of this mean?

It means that even before God created, He, in and of himself, was a community.

God, in his very nature, is relational. This is why John is able to make the declaration in 1 John 4:8 that “**God is love.**” Because God loves God’s self within the three persons of the Trinity. Theologian Stanley Grenz puts it this way, “**Active, self-giving love builds the unity within the one God. The unity of God is nothing less than each of the Trinitarian persons giving himself to the others. This unity is the dedication of each to the others. Through eternity the Father loves the Son, and the Son reciprocates that love. This love is the Holy Spirit, who is the Spirit of the relationship of the Father and the Son. Through all eternity, therefore, God is a social Trinity, the community of love.**”⁴

This Triune God makes man, *ADAM*, which means humanity in Hebrew. But he does something special with humanity. Genesis 1:26 states, “**Let Us make ADAM in Our image, according to Our likeness...**” So, humanity is made in the image and likeness of this Creator God, for the purpose of exercising God’s rule and reign over creation, as his representatives, by continuing God’s creative work of cultivating the creation into new and beautiful things. This is

⁴ Stanley Grenz, *Created for Community*, p. 47.

what God means when he commands the humans to “**Fill the earth and *subdue* it.**”⁵ Meaning that this creation, *ADAM*, is creative, he has the power of intelligence and reason. In his very being, *ADAM* is meant to be abundant. As well, like his creator Triune God, he is meant to pour himself out in love; he is meant to give himself away to another.

And so, “**God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female, he created them.**”⁶ Man and woman are created to be pointed outside themselves, and to continually pour into one another love and grace. But this is where it gets really interesting. While each individual is pointed outside themselves, and as they pour into one another, the relationship itself becomes pointed outward, created for another. Just as God, in the abundance of love that exists between the three persons, chooses to create *ADAM*, and be for him; so too are the humans out of their abundant love for one another supposed to create another and live for them.⁷

Because what happens when a man and woman love each other very much? They get married, they say “yes” to one another, and through their love for each other comes a third. And any married couple in the house will admit that marriage is a whole new level of being pointed outward; it reveals all of your selfish tendencies given enough time. And then having a child is a whole other level beyond that, where you literally give all of yourself to this being that will never be able to repay you.

⁵ Genesis 1:27

⁶ Genesis 1:27

⁷ For further discussion of this idea, watch this video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BTt8yU9bsiE>. This clip comes from a series of videos called “For The Life of the World: Letters to the Exiles.” You can find out more about them here: <http://www.letterstotheexiles.com>.

Humans, in the way that we make families, reflect the very triune nature of God.

They, like the Trinity, are meant to be a community of abundance, grace, and love, where they are constantly living for the glory for the others, and growing through procreation, learning to be more and more outward pointed as the community grows.

Sounds beautiful right? Well, let's all take a second to be honest, and say none of our families quite look like this. What happened? If God had created humanity to reflect this beautiful community of love, why do no families perfectly reflect this?

Well there's thing that happens called the Fall. Genesis 3 rolls around and God tells Adam and his wife, Eve, that they can eat of any tree in the garden of Eden, except for one tree: the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Now this tree is often misunderstood, but it's really quite simple at its' core. Who at this point in the story his defined good and evil? God has. God created and he declared it to be good, over and over again.

This tree, then, represents humanity's option to seize autonomy from God, and define Good and Evil on their own terms.⁸

⁸ See The Bible Project's video on Genesis 1-11: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KOUV7mWDI34&t=>. As well, much of this video is based on a book by a biblical scholar, John H. Sailhammer, called "The Pentateuch as Narrative," which is a landmark work on Pentateuchal scholarship.

How many of you know that essentially every argument you've had boils down to this, "I'm right, you're wrong." It's the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. You've made up in your own mind what is right and what is wrong, and no one else can tell you otherwise.

Adam and Eve, they eat fruit of the tree, and something interesting happens. Genesis 3:7 states, "At that moment their eyes were opened, and they suddenly felt shame at their nakedness. So they sewed fig leaves together to cover themselves." Why do they suddenly feel shame at their nakedness? I believe it's because they became suspicious of one another. They began to think, "What if their definition of what is good, is different of my definition of what is good? What if they see who I am and see me as evil?" They fall into the lie that if the other really knew who they were, there's no way they could love me. Suspicion is the death of love. Because if I can't trust you, I can't pour myself out to you, I cannot place my life in your hands, and I therefore cannot love you.

And this doesn't simply happen with one another, they become suspicious of God, and they run to hide from him. And so, God, no longer able to share his perfect community of love with the humans because they have become suspicious of his thoughts and intentions, and therefore are no longer loved by these humans, casts them out of the Garden of Eden. A cosmic fracture takes place, and God's space, and our space are separated from one another. And the rest of Genesis 4-11 shows how this human family now operates under their own definitions of good and evil.

They have two boys, Cain and Abel. And Cain in jealousy of his brother kills him. When God confronts Cain about this, he says to God, "Am I my brother's keeper?"⁹ Essentially asking the question, "Is my fellow human my responsibility?" Thus, begins tribal warfare; the mentality

⁹ Genesis 4:9

that I will do what's good for me and my tribe, even at the expense of you and your tribe. The family continues to fill the earth and grow.

Things get so bad that God, in order preserve the goodness of his good creation, must wipe humanity from the earth.

But he saves one family, who is said to be the only righteous family on the planet: Noah's family. So, Noah builds an arc, and God sends a flood, and Noah's family returns to dry land. But then Noah gets plastered, and there's this really sketchy moment in his tent with his sons. I won't get into the details, but it's tragic. And this dysfunctional family continues to grow, and eventually found the city of Babel, or Babylon. And this city is a community of humans who have decided to build a temple that reaches the heavens, which is a symbol for becoming their own God's. So, God in his mercy scatters the humans across the earth, to prevent the disaster that would occur from this uprising.

Then the Bible traces the lineage of one of the families from this city, and we are introduced to a guy named Abram, later on known as Abraham. God speaks to Abram and says go out and start a family. While Abraham is traveling around he makes a promise to him that will shape the direction of the rest of the biblical narrative. God says, **"I will make your offspring as numerous as the stars of the sky, I will give your offspring all these lands, and all the nations of the earth will be blessed by your offspring"**¹⁰

This is amazing. God makes humanity in his image in the way that they make families, and so it is through a family that God will redeem his creation. So, Abraham has a son named Isaac,

¹⁰ Genesis 26:4

and then Isaac has a son named Jacob, who is later given the name Israel, which means “Wrestles with God.” And then Jacob has twelve sons, but loves his second to youngest son Joseph the most.

Then Joseph's brothers, out of jealousy, sell Joseph into slavery in Egypt. But through a crazy chain of events becomes the right-hand man of Pharaoh. Eventually there's a famine in the land, and Joseph's brother come to Egypt looking for help, and who do they see, their good old brother Joseph who they had sold into slavery. But Joseph is not mad at them, but instead forgives his brothers and has them go get their Dad to come live in Egypt with him. At the end of the book of Genesis, Joseph makes this statement to his brothers, **“You planned this for evil, but God planned it for good, to save many lives.”**¹¹ And the rest of the Old Testament traces the history of the descendants of Abraham, who become the nation of Israel, in anticipation of the day the God sets the world back to the way it was supposed to be through his chosen people.

Now fast forward to the New Testament. The Gospel make a very audacious claim:

God himself came to be a human in the person of Jesus.

And how did this almighty creator God come? Through a family. Mary and Joseph. And this family is pretty incredible. Mary conceives Jesus as a virgin while they are engaged but not married. And when she tells Joseph this, he believes her, and stays with her. This a marriage not marked by suspicion, but of trust. Both in one another, and in God. It's almost antithetical to what we saw happen between Adam and Eve in the Garden.

¹¹ Genesis 50:20

Jesus grows up, and becomes a traveling teacher, and begins teaching all over Israel. But there's always been one teaching that has confused me more than most. Luke 14:26, Jesus says to the crowd, "If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple." What the heck is Jesus saying here? Does he hate his family? They seemed to be a pretty good family!

I wish I had more time to dig into this, but I don't. The point that Jesus is making, though, is that if your allegiance to him is not greater than your allegiance to your own family, than you cannot be his disciple. It is a call to abandon the tribal warfare mentality that has plagued humanity since Cain and Abel, the thought that I will do what's good for me and my tribe, even at the expense of you and your tribe. But it is also deeper than that.

In Matthew 12:46-50, it tells of this moment: "While He was still speaking to the crowds, behold, His mother and brothers were standing outside, seeking to speak to Him. Someone said to Him, 'Behold, Your mother and Your brothers are standing outside seeking to speak to You.' But Jesus answered the one who was telling Him and said, 'Who is My mother and who are My brothers?' And stretching out His hand toward His disciples, He said, 'Behold My mother and My brothers! For whoever does the will of My Father who is in heaven, he is My brother and sister and mother.'" Once again, a fascinating moment that I wish I could dig more into. But I want you to understand the basis of what Jesus is getting at here.

Earlier on in Matthew, Jesus said to the Pharisee's, "Don't just say to each other, 'We're safe, for we are descendants of Abraham.' That means nothing, for I tell you, God can create children of Abraham from these very stones."¹² I think what Jesus is getting at is that he is starting a new family, the family that God had intended when he promised Abraham that He would bless all

¹² Matthew 3:9

nations through his family. And this family is more real than even our blood relationships to biological families. We're going to come back to that thought, so hold onto it for just a moment.

The story continues on and Jesus is eventually betrayed by one of his disciples, Judas, and is handed over to the Jewish religious leaders, who then accuse him of treason in front of the Roman authorities, and he is sentenced to death via crucifixion. A brutal, humiliating, public form of torture. But then three days later, Jesus resurrects from the dead, and shows himself to his followers, and passes the baton of carrying on the redemptive mission of God to them by giving them the Holy Spirit after he ascends to heaven.

Later on, a man by the name of Saul, later known as Paul, becomes a follower of Jesus, and travels around the known world spreading the good news about resurrected Jesus, and plants churches in cities all across the Roman empire. And he would often write letters to these churches that he planted to encourage them, or to correct some kind of malpractice going on.

In one of these letters, a letter to the Church at Ephesus, he is reflecting on the Gospel, the story of Jesus, and he makes this statement: "All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms because we are united with Christ. Even before he made the world, God loved us and chose us in Christ to be holy and without fault in his eyes. 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."¹³

Paul is making an incredibly profound statement here.

¹³ Ephesians 1:3-5

He is saying that through Jesus' death and resurrection you are incorporated into community of God. How is this possible? Because when you come to faith in Jesus, you are "IN CHRIST." And through your incorporation into his body, you join the divine community of love.

Put simply, God is making a family, and by believing in Jesus, you have been adopted into it. Remember what Joseph said at the end of the book of Genesis, **"You planned this for evil, but God planned it for good, to save many lives"**¹⁴ Humans planned on committing evil by killing Jesus, but God planned it for good, to save all those who would pledge their allegiance to him by adopting them into this new family of God.

And this family, is the family that humans were always meant to be. This family is what Adam and Eve were supposed to make in the Garden. This is the family of Abraham that God said would bring blessing to the whole world. The kind of family that we all long for deep down.

This family that Paul is talking about is the Church; which is not a building, but is a people who have decided to follow Jesus no matter what the cost. And this community that he is bringing together through adoption is to function in the ways that he designed humans to as Image bearing creatures of the Triune God. They are to pointed outward toward one another, continually pouring themselves out in love and grace into each other. They are to marked by grace, life, and abundance. They are to be a community of love.

Paul makes the purpose of this family, the Church, clear in verse 10: **"And this is the plan: At the right time, he will bring everything together under the authority of Christ—everything in**

¹⁴ Genesis 50:20

heaven and on earth."¹⁵ Paul is now looking forward to the day when God finishes the work of redemption. The day when Christ returns and reunites heaven and earth back together. This family is not only to be pointed out toward one another, but the family itself is to be pointed out toward those outside the community.

The purpose of this family God is making, is to begin the process of bringing heaven to earth by reflecting the outward pointed love of their Triune God.

And this family will be fully consummated together in Christ at his return. You know what the coolest part of all of it is? What's the most commonly used image in the Bible to refer to the Day that Christ returns, and sets things back to the way they are meant to be? A wedding. And what's a wedding? The beginning of a new family. It's the beginning of a new adventure.

Now hopefully you find this all as incredible as I do, but you may be wondering what this had to do with shame, unhealthy coping mechanisms, and isolation. Well in order to address these issues, you first need to understand God's design for human relationships and community, and know the biblical vision of how things were supposed to be, and how they are going to be one day. Now that we've done that, let me make a few points about what this means for us today.

First, being the creation of a Triune God means humans are made for community. Grenz, in reflecting on Genesis 1, says this, "Because God himself is Triune, we are in the image of God only as we enjoy community with others. Only as we live in fellowship can we show forth what God is like. Ultimately, then, the "image of God" is a social reality. It refers to humans as

¹⁵ Ephesians 1:10

beings-in-fellowship.”¹⁶ And later, goes on to make this statement, “‘Sin’ refers to any attitude or action that fails to radiate God’s own character... ‘Sin,’ therefore, is the failure to reflect the image of God. But we cannot stop here... the God who is love is the Triune One, the community of the Father, Son and Spirit. Because God desires that we reflect the divine community—sin is a failure of community. Sin is the failure to live in fellowship with God, each other, and all creation.”¹⁷ In order to fully reflect the divine image which you bear, you must learn to live in community with this new family of God that you have been adopted into: the Church.

As we discussed earlier, though, in order to engage with community, you have to stop coping with pain and face your brokenness. You cannot numb the difficulties and pain of life and of relationships, and have healthy thriving relationships. If you numb one emotion, you numb all emotion, and you kill your ability to have authentic relationships with other people. And in order to do this, shame must be dealt with.

Before Jesus was betrayed by Judas, and was sentenced to death, he went to a garden called Gethsemane. And Gethsemane is Greek for “oil press.” The Gospel authors are trying to use the setting of an olive grove, where olives are picked, put then crushed on an olive press to make olive oil, to create an image that gives greater meaning and depth to what is about to take place. And Gethsemane is bringing together a bunch of different images and ideas from throughout the Bible, and in 1st century Jewish culture, together to make this very complex statement about the crucifixion of Jesus. But one of the ideas Gethsemane is drawing upon is a statement that prophesied by the name of Isaiah made 600 years prior to Jesus. He said this, "**But he was pierced for our**

¹⁶ Grenz, *Created for Community*, p. 80.

¹⁷ Grenz, *Created for Community*, p. 90.

rebellion, he was crushed for our sins; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed.”¹⁸

Do you see what the Gospel authors are doing here? They're describing the crucifixion of Jesus through the lens of Isaiah's prophecy. “He was crushed for our sins,” like how olives are crushed to make oil in Gethsemane. But the last part of Isaiah's statement is what pulls this whole image together. “By his wounds we are healed.” One of the main uses of olive oil, other than cooking, was it was used as medicine. It was actually one of the few medicines they had in the ancient middle east. It was drunk to cure stomach ailments, and it was applied to cuts and burns before being bandaged as a healing agent. The Gospel authors are making a statement about the death of Jesus by placing his last moments before his betrayal in an olive grove:

The blood of Jesus is the olive oil that will bring healing to your broken heart that has been marred by the effects of Sin.

And so, if Jesus has dealt with our sin, as a result he has dealt with our shame as well, for shame is a byproduct of sin; remember back to Genesis 3. Jesus, on the cross, makes the statement that he knows you wholly and completely, he knows the darkest corners of our heart that you are too afraid to even admit to yourself. And in light of that, he dies on a cross make the definitive statement that you are loved beyond your wildest imagine. Pastor Tim Keller puts it this way, "The gospel is this: We are more sinful and flawed in ourselves than we ever dared

¹⁸ Isaiah 53:5

believe, yet at the very same time we are more loved and accepted in Jesus Christ than we ever dared hope.”¹⁹

The difference between people who are held captive by feelings of shame, and those who have a deep sense of love and belonging, is that those who have a deep sense of love and belonging believe they are worthy of it. And while the Gospel claims you were completely undeserving of God’s love, it also says you are completely worthy of God’s love. The Gospel says you have done absolutely nothing to be deserving of God’s love. But, God looked at you and saw you as valuable enough to go to any length to prove his love for you.

He determined you to be so valuable, that He did the impossible: God died. The immortal became mortal, the infinite became finite, God became a man, and died, in order that you would have life, and come to experience the love of God.

If you are going to begin the process of truly engaging in community, you must first allow Jesus to heal your broken heart, marred by sin, of the shame you carry. Only then will you be able to stop numbing your heart and actually begin to experience radically vulnerable and authentic relationships.

But I won’t lie to you, this process isn’t an easy one. It will be painful at times. Times when the messiness of other people’s lives begin to splash on you, and God calls you to not run away from their messiness, but instead lean in and walk through the brokenness with them, it will not always be fun or easy. It will be messy, it will hurt at times. And times will come when being a

¹⁹ Timothy Keller, *The Meaning of Marriage*, p. 40.

part of community is going to confront you with your own brokenness, and you will have to fess up to just how messed up you are, and unhealthy coping mechanisms you have in your life, and that process is really painful!

Being in community will require you to stick with it when things get tough. Even when things are painful.

But if you do not do this, if you do not allow Jesus to heal you of your shame, so that you can enter into authentic and vulnerable relationships, and stop numbing your broken heart, you will never know what it means to be truly human. You will never understand what it means to reflect the divine image that you bear. And you will continue living in your dysfunction where you define good and evil on your own terms, and no one else can tell you different.

But this process is not an endless one. Just as Paul said there will be a day when Christ returns, and we will be fully consummated into the fullness of community; with our God, each other, and with the creation.

The Church is that future reality of community, the family of God, breaking into the now, for the purpose of being a blessing to the world.

Remember the promise made to Abraham, "I will make your offspring as numerous as the stars of the sky, I will give your offspring all these lands, and all the nations of the earth will be blessed by your offspring"²⁰ We, the Church, are descendants of Abraham, the family of God,

²⁰ Genesis 26:4

that will bring blessing to all the nations of the world. As we find healing together, in Christ and through his body, we will be enabled to bring that same hope and healing to a broken world.

Theologian Stephen Grabill put it this way, “[The Church is the body of Christ, given as a gift for the life of the world.](#)”²¹ Your healing is not simply for you, it is to make you the outward pointed human being that God created you to be, so that you can live in the community that he had always intended for you, so that you and your community can be pointed out as well and live as a blessing for the rest of the world.

We are a pioneering community.²² A community of people who are attempting to live into a reality that will be fully consummated in the future, in the here and now. We are people who pray daily, “[Our Father, who art in Heaven, Hallowed by thy name. Thy Kingdom come, they will be done, on earth as it is in heaven,](#)”²³ to remind ourselves that our identity is no longer in our ancestor Adam, but rather in Christ. And we have been commissioned to continue the redemptive work that Jesus began through the power of his Holy Spirit, until he returns and finishes the job.

A mentor of mine Bob Stone, often told me, “[Out of great pain, comes great ministry.](#)” No matter where you are today, I want you to know that there is hope and healing offered to you through the person of Jesus, and his body which is the Church. And on the other side of whatever is currently plaguing your life, is a beautiful ministry of bringing others brokenness and into life.

²¹ A quote from Stephen Grabill, in episode 7 of “For the Life of the World: Letters to the Exiles.” You can read a short blog post extrapolating this concept here: <http://www.letterstotheexiles.com/episode-7-letter-church/>.

²² This concept comes from chapters nine and ten of Grenz’s, *Created for Community*.

²³ Matthew 6:9-10

So may you, in the midst of whatever difficulty you may be facing, receive the healing love of God that will wash away your sin and shame. And through this, may you enter into community marked by radically vulnerable and authentic relationships, so that you would come to truly believe that you are worthy of love and belonging. And may your life no longer be pointed inward, controlled by your selfish tendencies, but may it be pointed toward others, constantly pouring yourself out in love and grace to those around you, so that the community itself would become pointed outward, and live as a blessing, for the life of the world.

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Questions for Reflection

1. *As you reflect back on your life, can you think of times when had a tendency to isolate yourself? Where you removed yourself from deeply vulnerable and authentic relationships? In what kind circumstances did you most often move away from community and toward isolation?*
2. *In those seasons of isolation, what unhealthy coping mechanisms did you engage with in order to deal with the stress and pain of that difficult season? How engaging with these coping mechanisms affect you? How did they affect your family? How did it affect the various communities you were a part of?*
3. *Throughout your life, what thought, feeling, habit, or experience has caused you the most reoccurring amount of shame? When do those feelings of shame tend to most often reoccur? How have you gone about dealing with those feelings of shame?*
4. *How does God being Triune, one essence three persons, affect your vision for who you are, and what God has designed you to experience? What kind of dreams do you begin to have when you hear that the image in which you were created in is one of active self-giving love, abundance, grace, life, and outward pointed focus?*
5. *In what ways have you fallen into the trap of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil? How have you gone about defining good and evil for yourself? What are some ways you have gone about taking autonomy from God, rejecting his definitions of good and evil?*
6. *In what ways have you become suspicious of God? In what areas do you have a hard time trusting that his intentions for you are good? Do you see any correlation between the ways that you have become suspicious of God, and the way you relate to your spouse, your kids, your family, your friends, and your community?*
7. *What is your reaction to Jesus' teaching on abandoning the tribal war mentality of doing what's good for you and your tribe, even at the expense of another's? What does it mean for you to give greater allegiance to Jesus, than even to your own family?*
8. *How does the fact that through faith in Christ, you have been adopted into the family of God? How does being adopted "In Christ" change in your idea of who you are?*
9. *What kind of vision comes to mind when you hear the statement, "The purpose of the family of God is continue the process of bringing heaven to earth by reflecting the outward pointed love of their Triune God"?*

10. *What does it mean that “The blood of Jesus is the olive oil that will bring healing to your broken heart, that has been marred by the effects sin”? How have you experienced this in your life? In what areas are you currently needing the blood of Jesus to bring healing to your brokenness?*
11. *What does it mean to you that “being in community will require you to stick with it when it gets tough. Even when things are painful.”? How, in the past have you stuck with community when things were difficult? In what ways have you failed to stick with community when things were difficult? What circumstances are you currently being challenged to stick with community despite the difficulties that it presents?*
12. *What do you think it looks like for the Church to be “that future reality of a fully consummated community, breaking into the here and now, for the purpose of being a blessing to the world?” Or, as Stephen Grabill put it, for “The Church to be the body of Christ, given as a gift for the life of the world”?*
13. *Read through the Lord’s Prayer (Matt. 6:9-13). How do you see the themes and ideas discussed here permeate the way Jesus taught his disciples to pray?*
14. *“Out of great pain, comes great ministry.” How have the painful circumstances of your life lead to you being able to minister to others more effectively? Are you currently going through circumstances that are painful, that you need to hopeful promise that they will one day be used to bring healing and life to those in brokenness?*