

“Why We Need Each Other”

Theme: The Daniel Plan

Scripture: *Ephesians 4:14-16*

Things I'd like to remember from today's sermon:

The Meditation Moments below are taken from The Daniel Plan Journal which may be purchased in Soul Food Books.

Meditation Moments for Monday, February 2 – Read John 21:9-10, 12-13 – How would you feel if Jesus cooked you a meal? The Bible gives us a snapshot of Jesus cooking a simple meal on the beach using fresh food. Jesus took the time to cook, and for his friends. Perhaps you can ask Jesus to join you as you prepare a meal, talking to him and praising him for supporting you on this journey to better health. If you want to change the way you eat, the logical place to begin is to change the way you cook. When you combine a deepening relationship with Jesus and making it an act of worship, it can be extraordinary.

- How does cooking food impact your experience of eating it?
- If you were going to cook for Jesus, what is the first meal you would prepare? Why don't you make that meal this week?

Tuesday, February 3– Read Ecclesiastes 4:9-10 – Working out with someone else helps you be more consistent in your exercise, stick with each session longer and even burn more calories! A workout buddy will encourage you, keep you accountable, and push you to reach your goals. When you exercise with a friend, you help each other prepare to serve God with more stamina and energy. This also offers you an opportunity to help someone else.

- How would a fitness buddy help you stay motivated and reach your goals?
- Ask God who could be a fitness partner for you. Who could you join on his or her fitness journey?

Wednesday, February 4– Read Psalm 119:48- The temptation to abandon the healthy habits we are learning through the Daniel Plan can be strong at times. Your only change to overcome those temptations is to follow the model of Jesus. When Jesus was tempted, he responded with scripture (Matthew 4:1-11) Jesus would meditate on and memorize God’s Word. Biblical meditation is not about emptying your mind, but filling is with truth. It simple means to read a passage, think about it, and repeat it to yourself. No habit will help you in the spiritual dynamics of getting healthy more than memorizing and meditating on the Word of God.

- What are some of the temptations you face on your Daniel Plan journey?
- Do you struggle with your eating habits when you are stressed?
- Does your exercise routine suffer when you become too busy?
- Jesus overcame temptation with Scripture. What are some of God’s promises you can memorize to counteract the temptations in your life?

Thursday, February 5– Read 1 Corinthians 13:1 – The apostle Paul said that no matter what language we speak, we must wrap it in love. (Read Romans 13:10) God designed us to reach out to one another and to look out for each other’s needs. Loving others well is a sign we belong to Christ.

- How do you speak the language of love? In his book “The Five Love Languages”, Gary Chapman says we each have at least one love language: words of affirmation, receiving gifts, quality time, physical touch, acts of service. Do you know your love language?
- Do you know your families (or friends) love languages?
- Put love into practice. Consider your family, friends, or small group and ask how you can best communicate with them.

Friday, February 6 – Read Mark 9:22 – It is possible to have faith and doubts at the same time. You can have faith that God wants you to do something and still be scared to death. God lets you begin with the faith you already have.

Confronting destructive lifelong habits and working toward better physical health can be scary. Faith is believing that God can do the seemingly impossible in your life, even if you don’t understand how.

- What are some areas in your life where you trust God is at work?
- What are some areas in your life where you’re struggling with doubt, wondering if and how God is really helping you? Bring those concerns to God in prayer.
- How have you already seen God provide for you in your Daniel Plan journey?

Saturday, February 7– Read Daniel 1:12-15 – Daniel didn’t just eat what was put in front of him. He was intentional about what he ate.

When you think clearly about what you eat, God empowers you to continue to make good choices. By thinking ahead, preparing ahead, you won't have 'food emergencies'. By eating healthy, you won't crash in the afternoon because you ate a greasy, fast-food lunch. Instead you be on top of your game, ready to do what God has called you to do.

- What are three things you can do to think clearly and prepare in order to avoid a food emergency?
- What changes do you notice in yourself when you practice mindful and intentional breathing, eating, praying, etc.?

Theme: The Daniel Plan
“Why We Need Each Other”

Sermon preached by Jeff Huber based on a sermon series by Rick Warren
January 31-February 1, 2015 at First United Methodist Church, Durango

Scripture – Ephesians 4:14-16

14 Then we will no longer be immature like children. We won't be tossed and blown about by every wind of new teaching. We will not be influenced when people try to trick us with lies so clever they sound like the truth. 15 Instead, we will speak the truth in love, growing in every way more and more like Christ, who is the head of his body, the church. 16 He makes the whole body fit together perfectly. As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love.

VIDEO Daniel Plan Week 4 Sermon Starter

SLIDE Why We Need Each Other

Today we continue in a sermon series on the Daniel Plan, looking at how we can be healthy in body, mind and spirit. Today's message is a counter-cultural one. The message today is the exact opposite of what we've been taught most of our lives. God promises that if we will take this truth seriously we'll take a huge step towards dealing with loneliness, fatigue, fear, frustration, failure, depression and despair, and replacing them with hope. The big idea of today's sermon is actually pretty simply and it's the concept of community.

Let's be honest, as Americans we idolize independence. We have the Declaration of Independence upon which our country is founded. We like songs like, "I've Got to Be Me," and, "I'll do it my way." We love the Lone Ranger, and we conveniently forget that even he had Tonto. 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 and 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 in our culture rises as does the number of people who say they are lonely most of the time.

Obviously, the myth of independence bringing happiness is not true. The Scriptures teach us 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 us to go through life not as solitary individuals but in community.

Paul says as much in Romans 12, a text we've looked at before.

SLIDE *3 Because of the privilege and authority God has given me, I give each of you this warning: Don't think you are better than you really are. Be honest in your evaluation of yourselves, measuring yourselves by the faith God has given us. 4 Just as our bodies have many parts and each part has a special function, 5 so it is with Christ's body. We are many parts of one body, and we all belong to each other.*

Notice that the first, the preface to being part of one body and needing each other is setting aside our need for independence and instead not thinking we are better than others or better off on our own. We need each other. The Scriptures teach us that community is not optional. Especially if I've been hurt in the past, I might feel like, "I'm very self-sufficient. I don't need other people in my life." But the truth is we absolutely have to have other people in our lives if we're going to be all God wants us to be.

Today I want us to start a journey on an even bigger idea. There's no way we can be all God wants us to be, do all God wants us to do, fulfill the purposes that we were put on this planet to fulfill on our own. We have to do it in relationship with other people. We need each other and we belong to each other in the body of Christ. We are going to start with a fundamental question in life I get more than just about any other as a pastor.

SLIDE *Why do relationships go bad?*

I want to confess at the beginning that I'm no expert on relationship and I struggle just like many of you with sustaining healthy, long-term relationships. How do we turn a bad relationship into a good one? How does God use relationships to make us into what God wants us to be, maturing and developing into the likeness of Christ? We're going to try and discover what it really means to develop true, intimate relationships and why we need them.

SLIDE I need others to walk with me

What does that mean? It means I need you to help me grow spiritually. Did you know that the Bible often compares life to a walk? The Bible uses this image because you and I are on a journey. We don't just sit still in life. We're not where we used to be. We're not where we are going to be. We're on a journey. This is why the scriptures call 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 the Spirit and walk as Jesus walked.

The scriptures also teach us that we were never meant to walk through life alone. This has nothing to do with whether I am single or married. We have many 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.

I can already hear what some of you are saying in your head, "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. I like walking alone." I may like walking alone and it's okay to do that on occasion, but you and I need others to walk with us. There are several reasons why we can't always walk alone.

SLIDE It's safer to walk together

Walking through life with other people in 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. Have you ever walked down a long road in the countryside by yourself, and then the coyote howls! It can be scary. It's safer to walk through life with others, just ask this puppy who's the star of a Super Bowl commercial this weekend.

VIDEO Super Bowl Puppy

Can you believe your pastor just showed a Budweiser commercial in church! Whether you drink beer or not, it's a great commercial on why we shouldn't walk alone and why we need each other.

SLIDE We have more support when we walk together

Community can keep you from giving up. When we're walking with other people we get the energy to keep on going that we wouldn't have otherwise.

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 about mile twenty! You start thinking, "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:

SLIDE ***"When you run alone you run fast. But when you run together you run far."***

Those are good words. Life is not a 50-yard dash. It is a marathon. If we want to make it to the end of life we need to have other people involved in our lives. 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.

GRAPHIC 1 Flock of Geese

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

SLIDE ***It's smarter to do life together***

It's just smarter to go through life with a few really close deep friends. We learn more by walking with others than we do by ourselves. Proverbs 28:26 puts it this way in the CEV (Contemporary English Version).

SLIDE ***"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 probably wrong. I may be walking in the wrong direction. But if I'm walking by myself through life, I don't have anybody to go, "We're off the path. We missed it. We've got to get back on the path." Of course there are times when the group or popular opinion is wrong, but in general, we are smarter when we travel together.

One of the things that's very important that we learn when we walk with others is we learn how to get along with other people. If we go through life isolated, never letting anybody get close to us, never cooperating with anybody

then we don't learn how to cooperate and work together. That's one of the great lessons of life. Have you ever noticed that when you walk with other people everybody walks at a different pace? Those of you who are married, have you ever tried to walk with your husband or your wife on the River Trail? We all have different strides—different strokes for different folks—so we have to learn to compromise.

In Genesis 2:18, one of the very first stories in the Bible, we read:

SLIDE *18 Then the Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper who is just right for him."*

That's the first thing God said after God created the first human. God looked down at a perfect environment, the Garden of Eden, and said, "It's not good. It's not good for people to be alone." God does not want us to be alone or live in isolation. That's why God created humanity in the first place, because God wanted community, people to love and love him back.

As part of creation, God created both a physical family for humanity and a spiritual family. The physical family is the one in which we grew up. The spiritual family is the one we have the rest of our lives and eventually into eternity. The physical family eventually moves apart, but the spiritual family, God's church, is going to go on forever and ever. Sometimes our physical families are not much of a family at all. Sometimes they are abusive and destructive, which is all the more reason God wants us to be connected as part of the body of Christ.

I love Hebrews 10 where we read these words.

SLIDE *23 Let us hold tightly without wavering to the hope we affirm, for God can be trusted to keep his promise. 24 Let us think of ways to motivate one another to acts of love and good works. 25 And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of his return is drawing near.*

Notice that the way we can "hold tightly, without wavering, to the hope we affirm, for God can be trusted to keep his promise," is by motivating each other and encouraging each other to acts of love and good works. God says we'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! We can't encourage each other here. We can't even get to talk to very many people because there are just too many people and not enough time. This habit can only be done in a small group. Can we be in a crowd and be lonely? Yes we can because it has nothing to do with the size. For some of us, our most lonely times can happen in a crowd when we feel like we are left out or no one in the crowd notices that we are even there. Hebrews is 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 and it needs it now! We need to learn how to love. I need others in my life as I'm walking through life.

SLIDE I need other people to grow.

I cannot grow without other people in my life. Why? I need other people in my life to grow because life is about relationships and not about achievement. God is love and God wants us to learn to love. We are supposed to learn to love God and love others. Those are the two greatest lessons in life that mirror the two great commandments. Ephesians 4 reminds us of how this happens.

SLIDE *14 Then we will no longer be immature like children. We won't be tossed and blown about by every wind of new teaching. We will not be influenced when people try to trick us with lies so clever they sound like the truth. 15 Instead, we will speak the truth in love, growing in every way more and more like Christ, who is the head of his body, the church. 16 He makes the whole body fit together perfectly. As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love.*

God 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 we can do that and it has to be together. I need that and you need that too. We've got to get with other Christians to walk through life together. We can't learn community without being in a community. We need more than just this crowd. We need community because it is only in community that we can mature and become like Christ. 1 Peter 4 drives this truth home.

SLIDE *9 Cheerfully share your home with those who need a meal or a*

place to stay. 10 God has given each of you a gift from his great variety of spiritual gifts. Use them well to serve one another. 11 Do you have the gift of speaking? Then speak as though God himself were speaking through you. Do you have the gift of helping others? Do it with all the strength and energy that God supplies. Then everything you do will bring glory to God through Jesus Christ. All glory and power to him forever and ever! Amen.

We have complaints about opening up our homes. 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 to do. "My home isn't big enough." Can you put three people in it? Then you can have a group. Jesus said, "Where two or more are gathered in my name, I'm there in the midst of them." You might be thinking, "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 might be thinking, "Nobody would want to come to my house and study this." Everybody has a longing for belonging. 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. There are people in your neighborhood that would love to come to your house.

If you have been in a group before and you were hurt or it didn't work out, I encourage you to give it another try. Sometimes it takes a few tries to find the right group, and when you do it's awesome!

SLIDE I also need others to work with me.

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. God says these are your good works.

Some of you came to church exhausted. You're exhausted. You're burned out. 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 or me to go through life walking alone or working alone. We need to be in relationship with

others who help us get done what we need to do. Otherwise we're going to be worn out and fatigued all the time. I know when I get tired it's usually because I am tired of doing it all by myself.

Ecclesiastes 4 is a passage we often read at weddings, but it's really meant to speak to all of us.

SLIDE *7 I observed yet another example of something meaningless under the sun. 8 This is the case of a man who is all alone, without a child or a brother, yet who works hard to gain as much wealth as he can. But then he asks himself, "Who am I working for? Why am I giving up so much pleasure now?" It is all so meaningless and depressing. 9 Two people are better off than one, for they can help each other succeed. 10 If one person falls, the other can reach out and help. But someone who falls alone is in real trouble. 11 Likewise, two people lying close together can keep each other warm. But how can one be warm alone? 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.*

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 are all kinds of benefits to working together. If one falls, the other can reach out and help, but if you fall alone you're in real trouble. Two people can keep warm, and that's usually much more fun! When you are alone you can succumb to attack but two can stand back to back and three are even better. This is very practical really!

Some people fall for what 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 do that. She had an army of people helping her and other Sisters of Charity who helped. 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 1,000 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. When I'm tired it's because I don't have the relationships built in to support me that I need for what God has called me to do. Have you ever seen movie Witness with Harrison Ford? There is this scene where the Amish build a barn together and they do it in a day. The whole community shows up and at the end of the day there's a barn standing. How? Everybody has a little part to play. There were men, women and children and they all had a part to play.

SLIDE I need others to watch out for me in life

I'm talking about people who'll defend me, stand up for me and protect me, like we read at the end of that passage from Ecclesiastes 4. Who will help me keep staying on track, watch my backside, warn me. We all need this because we all have blind spots. Philippians 2 speaks to us about this powerful, counter cultural truth.

SLIDE *1 Is there any encouragement from belonging to Christ? Any comfort from his love? Any fellowship together in the Spirit? Are your hearts tender and compassionate? 2 Then make me truly happy by agreeing wholeheartedly with each other, loving one another, and working together with one mind and purpose. 3 Don't be selfish; don't try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves. 4 Don't look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others, too. 5 You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had.*

In America, the general idea is that it's all about ME. It's all about MY needs, MY interest, MY wants, MY desires and 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 interests but look out for others too, because this is the attitude of Christ who went to the cross for all of humanity.

Have you ever seen Neighborhood Watch signs? 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 and you were gone for a week or 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! We also have some older neighbors that live near and when one of them has to go somewhere, they ask us to keep an eye out for their spouse. That what we do in community, we look out for each other.

The question is not, "Is anybody watching out for your stuff?" The question in Christian community is, "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 things like these? "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." Is there anyone in your life who will encourage you in your spiritual life?

We all need people like that in our lives. The fact is that we all have blind spots. We all have things we can't see. Let's say a tail light goes out on our car. 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! You're unzipped! You have a green thing stuck between your teeth." Friends don't let friends leave spinach stuck in their teeth, or a little booger hanging from their nose! That's what people who care about you do. They say, "You've got a booger! Get that thing out!" We need to watch out for each other because there's some stuff we just can't see.

That's probably a first for most of you, the pastor talking about Budweiser and boogers in the same sermon! But here's my point, and the scriptures drive it home again and again. We should care about each other. We're 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.

I was reading this last week about a pastor who went to visit a maximum security prison yard with two thousand inmates in the yard. He walked across that prison yard with no guard protecting him. He had no gun, no weapon and no body armor. It was just him and he said was not afraid. Do you know why? Because he had a group of other inmates, about thirty of them, who were Christians in front of him, behind him and on either side of me. If anybody wanted to get at him they were going to have to get through guys who had tattoos that said "Mom" and "Jesus." He was not afraid because there members of God's family there to

protect him.

Here's my question. **Is there anybody watching your backside?** Is there 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 men if you're a man or women if you're a woman 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 then I worry for you. You've got a big bull's eye on your back, like the sheep who wanders off from the flock and shepherd and the sheep dogs. You're like that lost puppy in the commercial who needs the herd for protection.

When I was in high school I would spend a good chunk of my weekends in the summer on beach in Santa Cruz. Everybody knows you never go swimming by yourself in the ocean. You might catch a rip tide. You never go by yourself. When you go climbing in the mountains or back country skiing, everyone knows you shouldn't go by yourself. When I took kids on Mission Trips every kid had two buddies and they looked out for each other when we went to an inner city location or an amusement park. If one got hurt, then one would stay with that person while the other went for help.

Did you remember the movie *127 Hours*? It's the true story about of Aron Ralston, an experienced climber, who was climbing a mountain when he slipped and fell into a ravine and got his arm caught. He couldn't get out and 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 to cut his own arm off. It was either that or die stuck in an isolated canyon in the Utah desert. Even the pros need a buddy.

Community is God's answer to defeat. Ecclesiastes 4 said, "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. I'm pretty sure that most of us have something in our lives that we can't get control of. I have never met a single person who doesn't have something in their life they'd like to change but have been unable to change. We're never going to be able to change it on our own. If we could have, we would have but we can't so we won't. We 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.

SLIDE I need others to wait with me and to weep with me

I need people who will wait with me while I'm waiting for the bad news, and they weep with me 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 husband's 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. 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.

There was a man who came to this church for several years. He sat by himself in the back of the sanctuary. He never got involved in anything. He never joined a small group. He just came to worship and left. He never even met anybody in the church, other than to say hello during the greeting time. I'm the only person he ever knew. He never made any friends in the family. One day he

had got pneumonia and ended up in the hospital. Then he got an infection and he was in for two weeks. He didn't mark that he was a Methodist when he checked into the hospital and he never told anyone in the office he was there. I was out on my renewal leave for four months and I didn't even hear about it. When he got out of the hospital he wrote me a note and said, "I'm leaving the church because it's unfriendly. Nobody visited me in the hospital."

I felt bad for him, but I also was sad and a bit angry. He never visited anybody in the hospital. He never cared enough to even meet anybody. He never served with a group on Love Out Loud weekend. He never got in a group, never gave, never shared. In some ways he has to bear some of the responsibility because when the crisis came nobody was there for him because he had not invested in others. I can't take care of all of you. Even all of those in our congregational care area can't take care of all of you. We need you to care for each other.

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 encourages us, "Be happy with those who are happy, and weep with those who weep." We do that in the group. Somebody has a good thing like a promotion or celebration, a graduation, and we should party with them. Somebody has a tough time, we weep with them.

Sometimes 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 and 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 can do. Whenever there is a tear it's time to stop and pray or give each other an embrace. Learn to be comfortable with tears as they are powerful moments you can stop and pray together in a group.

"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 twenty-two 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.” 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 and 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. Just be there. Sit there with them and sometimes you sit in silence.

SLIDE I need others to witness with me

What do I mean by that? Each of us has a life message that God wants us to share with the world. It’s part of our mission. God put us on earth to do something. There is great power in groups witnessing together by serving together and praying together and showing the world together what it means to be the presence of Christ in places where there has been drought, famine, flood, earthquakes and hurricanes. God never meant for us to do our mission alone. God 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 and doing it together. Jesus said these words in John 13

SLIDE *34 So now I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other. 35 Your love for one another 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, is that you love other people in the family of God and then you learn together to live out that love in the world. If we do not love other people in the family of God we’ve got every reason to doubt, “Am I in it?” When we’re truly in God’s family we start loving others in God’s family.

That’s what impresses the community, “See how they love.” That’s what we want First United Methodist Church to be known for, being the presence of Christ for each other and for the world. What impresses others should not be our size or our buildings or our sermons or not our music, but instead it should be, “That’s the place where you get loved. That’s where they love you. That’s where

it's ok for a guy to stand up and go, 'I've got a sex addiction.' That's the place where it's ok 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.

We have to do it together. 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. Would you say this with me?

SLIDE "I really, really, really need a group."

That is our declaration of interdependence. I believe God brought you here today because God wants you to be involved and not sitting on the sidelines. My prayer is that we'll jump in together. If you have not joined a group for this sermon series, it's not too late, because we start another one with small groups in two weeks.

This meal we are about to celebrate, Holy Communion, was done by Jesus with his small group. I invite you to come forward and ask God to bring you that group into your life this year.

SLIDE Communion