

Feb 18, 2007 • "Family Traits, 2.0; Community"

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How are we? Are we good? If you have your Bibles, open them up to Romans chapter 12. That's where we were last weekend; it's where we will be this weekend. Actually, we're just going to finish out twelve, or finish out the next section of twelve as we move from foot washing into community. That's what's on the agenda for this weekend.

On Wednesday night, Lauren and I, we celebrated our 10th Valentine's Day together. I know if you've been married longer than 15 years you're probably rolling your eyes right now, kind of like Lauren and I do when dating people go out and celebrate their 1-month anniversary or their 2-month anniversary or their 3-month anniversary. But, for us, just being married 7 years, we still kind of count certain things, and this was our 10th Valentine's Day together. So we went out and ate a really good meal, and then she wanted to go see a movie. I wanted to go see *The King of Scotland*, that's not really a Valentine's Day movie, so we went and saw a movie, and just had a good time together. I got in bed later that night, and I was laying there, and my wife falls asleep very, very quickly, it takes me awhile, and so 2 or 3 seconds after we got into bed, she was gone. I sat in there and laid there and kind of stared at the ceiling and thought about all that God has done and all that he has been and all that he is in our lives, and in our marriage, and the things he's done to bring us together as one. And I thought of how much things have changed and how much change has taken place in my life because of marriage – like the 6 years before I got married to Lauren, I just lived with dudes. I mean, I just lived with dudes, and dudes do life differently and they live differently and they smell differently and they function differently than girls do – or at least that was my experience. I mean I know there are some dudes that iron stuff and like potpourri, but that was not the guys I was living with. We did not even, I guess, even realize, what the smells were like in our apartment. So, when I married Lauren, I really needed some help. I mean I needed some help because I didn't know how to operate within that relationship and the things that were important to her verses what was important to me and how I lived verses how she lived – and so for the first 3 or 4 months of being married, I was completely lost because I was just living how I know to live. So, I would throw my towel on the bathroom floor. I would leave my dishes on the counter, or on the table, and I would just handle them later, and what began to happen were these kind of awkward moments where Lauren would call me into a room and she would ask me a question that seemed overtly like she should know it. It seemed like it would be obvious. She would point to my towel on the ground and go "what's that? What is that?" And so for me, I didn't quite understand, so I'd just answer, "it's a towel – I wiped with it. It's a towel. I was wet, and so I wiped – it's my towel". It just went bad after that because she wasn't asking me a question, she was trying to point something out. So, maybe I can help the young bucks in here. If your young bride pulls you into a room and asks you a question that seems obvious to you – here's the best way I know to play it - just start apologizing. Just immediately start apologizing. Pick up the object in question, and slowly make your way out of the room. Now, this next part is key. This next part is very key. You cannot show any fear, all right? Don't show any fear. If she picks up that you might be afraid, things might go horribly wrong for you. So, take the object, walk out of the room, find a phone, and

call an older man and ask them what to do with the object. And then maybe, just maybe, you'll get out of it clean. It's the only way I know. I learned now that those hooks on the back of the bathroom door- you're supposed to put your towel on there. I didn't know what they were for, honestly, for years. And I've learned that you should wipe down your dishes and put them in the dishwasher, but I didn't know that before. I just thought some kind of fairy or something did it. I didn't understand how they got clean.

God is right in the Scripture in comparing marriage and comparing our relationship with husbands and wives to how we relate to him in his Church. Like, back in those days I'm so grateful for Godly, older, married men who came into my life and grabbed hold of me and said 'listen, you've got to be careful, you've got to watch this' and taught me kind of how to grow. There was this process of growth. There was this process of me seeing things in me that I knew were wrong; that I knew didn't honor Lauren. So we would work on those things. Then, as soon as I got those things down there were these other things that were revealed to me that I needed to work on, that I needed to work through. And as God did that in my life, he did that in Lauren's life also. And it was this process – this process that led us to Wednesday night, eating a great meal, seeing a great flick, laughing, enjoying one another. The process that brought us to that kind of depth of relationship – the kind of depth of relationship that we enjoy now. It was this kind of process of growth where in doing life together, we kind of rubbed against each other and strained, and chipped away and chiseled away at each other. And this is what the Scriptures say occurs in the Church. That in the same way that marriage is this process of deepening and growth and rubbing against one another in such a way that produces maturity so it is as we walk in the Church, as we are the people of God, walking with other people who have surrendered their lives to Christ, that we begin to grow and mature within the process of doing life together.

So, let me tell you what I want to do this weekend. What I want to do is I want us just to look at a text that is in the Bible that is very prescriptive on how Church should function. What it should be like, what should be in there, what shouldn't be in there, how we should interact with one another, how we should never interact with one another. And then I want to kind of pull it from what we read in Scripture to kind of the reality of life here at the Village. Kind of the reality of working these things out in the complexity that is the Village Church. So if you have your Bibles, I hope you do – if you don't there should be on in a seat around you. Grab it and we're going to be in Romans 12. We're going to pick it up in verse 9. We won't read long before we talk. Here we go.

Let love be

What? Yeah.

Let love be genuine.

There are 2 ways to interpret this text out of the Greek. Now this is a positive interpretation of the Greek.

Let love be genuine

But there's a negative way to also interpret this out of the Greek. It would mean the exact same thing, but I think it carries more weight. So, in the ESV, they

Let love be genuine

But it can also be translated

Let love be without hypocrisy.

Now this is going to be unbelievably key for everything else we say for the next 30 – 45 minutes. This is the key to the whole rest of this text.

Let love be without hypocrisy

So let me define hypocrisy. In the simplest definition I can give you of hypocrisy, hypocrisy is pretending – pretending to look a certain way that's not really how you are in the core of your being. And so, hypocrisy is that moment when we begin to pretend – and we'll bring it into the Church world – we pretend that we're walking with Jesus and we know him intimately, and we're walking with him passionately, when that's not the case. So whenever we're around Church people, we're at the Church, we're in our home group, we're at some Church function – we're like 'Praise Jesus – let's raise our hands – let's take our notes' we pretend that all is well when it's not. Hypocrisy is when we walk in to that Christian setting, come into the Church setting, and we pretend that all is OK in our marriage, when it's not. That all is OK in the lives of our children, when it's not. That all is well with how we're living life, when it's not. When we pretend that we're not struggling with secret sin, when in fact we are. The scriptures say the Church cannot afford to play this game. The Church cannot afford to be filled with men and women who understand what the externals of a changed heart are, and then begin to play the externals rather than digging into the core issues of their being.

Let love be without hypocrisy

Now this is not only a good idea, but it's absolutely actionable. Like here's what I mean. It's impossible – it is impossible – to receive love if you are pretending to be something you're not on how you behave and how you act because any love that is shown to you will be impossible for you to receive because you'll acknowledge in the deep places they love the false, external you, and not the real you. So the Scriptures say in order for you to feel a part, in order for you to walk in genuine community, in order for you to grow into the fullness of Christ, in order for you to be a part of the process that brings us to maturity in Jesus, love can have no hypocrisy in it. We can't be pretenders. Let me tell you why that this carried into it's full becomes so damaging and so destructive and if we had some testimony time in here today, I guarantee that there would be people that would come up and grab a microphone and explain that they've been a part of something like this, or in a Church that this happened to them. What ends up happening when the majority of the

people in a church are pretending that they're more than they are – what ends up happening is order to hide their flaws, in order to hide their sins, in order to hide their weaknesses and to keep the mask and the pretending going, they will point out the more serious flaws of others and elevate those flaws as the real flaws so they never have to deal with their own junk. Beware men and women who always have an enemy. They always have an enemy because inside they know they're broken, they're fragmented, they're off, and they are living a false, pretending, mask oriented, Christian existence. So they have to elevate the sins of others to make them feel better about themselves. Do you know that in the Scriptures more than Jesus was concerned with action, he was concerned with heart. Like Jesus, he's going to trump this idea that action, or the external action, is what drives the whole thing home. Like Jesus over and over again – I know we've talked about this 100 times – Jesus is going to say 'hey – you've heard it said – don't murder – but I'm telling you murder is not the issue. The hate in the heart is the issue. If you don't have hate in your heart, then you won't murder. You've heard me say 'don't commit adultery. The law says don't commit adultery.' But, listen, if you're lusting all the time after another woman or another man that's not your spouse, then you're not free' So in the end, Jesus says 'no it's about the heart, it's about what's inside. Don't let love, don't let the Church, be filled with hypocrites or be filled with pretenders. Be honest about where you are. Be honest where you struggle. The Church has to be a place where it's OK to not be OK. It has to be safe. It has to be that place where we can come in and go 'I have failed this week. I have failed miserably this week. Please pray for me. Please help me. Please teach me'. If the Church becomes anything other than that, then it's forced to be a place of shallow triviality, where things that are not important are elevated to what is important, and what truly is important is neglected, if not outright ignored.

Now I know that there are some of us in here, and right now we're going 'maybe there's 2 camps. There's 1 camp that's saying 'well, you know, c'mon, actions DO matter. I mean, come on, you can't just say they can come in and act however they want' and then there's another group in here that like 'yes! Anything goes!' Right? And so we kind of divide into these two camps. But the next line is going to address kind of our actions and what we're involved in, so look back at the Scriptures.

Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil. Hold fast to what is good.

OK – look right at me. The most shallow, empty, cowardly, weak kind of love there is – if it's even love at all – is the man or woman who will see a brother or sister in Christ struggling with sin, living in sin, walking in sin, walking in what the Scriptures call wicked, and say nothing to him, say nothing to her, do not confront, do not sit down, do not call out. But instead do one of two things – either hope that it all works out well for them in the end, or worse yet, does the kind of prayer request, gossip thing, where they gather some other men and women unto themselves and say 'we need to pray for such and such in our home group. We need to pray for such and such in my neighborhood. We need to pray for such and such in my Bible study because they're doing this, this, this and this with this person that person and that person. So we need to pray for them'. Now listen, I don't let my daughter run around our house with scissors. If I can catch her. I don't let her play with fire. I don't watch her get into dangerous scenarios. I don't watch

my son open up the cupboard under the sink and pull out the Drano and chew on the lid and go 'I hope that in the end, he can digest this stuff well. I hope that in the end he survives'. But tell me this isn't the spiritual game almost all of us get caught up into. The Scriptures say, no no no no! Abhor what is evil. That you should grieve over what is evil. That you should love enough; that love should be genuine enough, that we would take those close to us, take those we know, take those we love, who are openly walking in sin, or getting very, very dangerously close to it, to a cup of coffee or to a dinner table and say 'I love you. I worried. Do you know that the Scriptures say this.' This is going to be where you're going to listen. Some of you right now are like 'dangit, Chandler!' because you've been struggling with this one. It happens all the time. We all seem to have those men and women in our crew who want to push the lines. But listen, eventually, we're all going to need to be confronted.

Very early on in ministry, in fact the first year that I began to preach and teach, I was asked a direct question by a man named Steve Hardin who was over me in the ministry I was a part of. He asked me a question, and I didn't tell him the whole truth. I kind of told him a half-truth. I didn't feel like I lied, but I didn't tell him really what he was asking for. Right? And so I was like 'well, I can say this, and not give away this'. So to make a long story really short, I got straight up busted. I got straight up busted, and I got called into our offices and I sat at a table, and Steve Hardin walked up to me and told me that he knew what had really happened and what had gone on and then he asked me just one question; he goes 'is this who you want to be? I mean do you want to be the half-truth guy? Half-truth guys don't get to preach the Bible. Half-truth guys aren't a power conduit through which the Holy Spirit flows. Half-truth guys dishonor God.' And I mean I sat at that table and sobbed and sobbed and sobbed, and then they didn't let me preach for the next 3 weekends, or the next 3 weekdays- it was Thursday night. They didn't let me preach for the next 3 weeks. And some of you are like 'for a half truth?' Please, I praise Christ for that day. I praise Christ for that day. Because what could've happened is I could've taken this 'oh, you can get away with stuff; oh you don't have to be full on honest. Oh you could go...' and I could've taken that and could've become kind of a character pattern for how I function. But a man in my life who loved me and loved Christ in me way too much to let that go. Had a very awkward, very uncomfortable, very horrible meeting with me. And I think because he had the courage to do that, I am standing in front you today. Because he had the courage to do that, I'm pastoring this place. Who knows how it plays out if no one checks me, even on something that small. The Scriptures say – you've got to learn to hate sin. And I hate to say this, because it's so clique, but it also says – cling to what is good. I mean this is kind of where we get that idea that sin has got to bother us, but we've got to love people. So if you've ever kind of heard 'hate the sin – love the sinner' I mean that's kind of where we got this. This is this idea –hate what is evil, but cling to what is good. So let's hate adultery. Let's hate debauchery, let's hate lies, let's hate all the destructive forces of sin. But we don't hate people. That's not our battle. Our battle is not in flesh and blood. Let's love people, but when it needs to be called out, it has to be called out. So let love be without hypocrisy. Let it be genuine, and let's learn to hate what is evil, while holding fast, clinging to what is good. Look at what he says next:

Let love be genuine, abhor what is evil hold fast to what is good (verse 10 is one of the most difficult commands in Scripture) **love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor.**

Now this idea of brotherly affection is this; that I should have feelings for you. All right? That this is not an action. This is not - *do* this to other Christians, *behave* this way towards other Christians. He's saying may we have brotherly affection for – this idea is that our guts would tingle – and I know it's kind of a weird illustration. Half the room is very uncomfortable right now. But that our guts would tingle when we got around each other. That we would love each other like we were a part of the same family. My son is doing that thing. He's finally to that place that when I walk in the door he beams and squeals and runs up to me. Now that creates something in me. It doesn't matter how long the day was, how hard the day was, what I had to deal with that day. I walk in that door and have him squeal and walk with locked legs up to grab me, it creates in me deep and abiding affection for him. That we are family, this is my blood. This is my family.

The Scriptures just commanded us to feel for one another. How hard is that? Like the reason why the hypocrites and why – and when I say hypocrites, I mean all of us – the reason the hypocrites love the 'do' verses is because that's the easy part. That's the part that sometimes we can muster up enough strength to accomplish – correct? But this one – 'feel' – 'have brotherly affection for'. But listen. I think that this part of the text is inseparably linked to the first line.

Let love be without hypocrisy

If you think about who you have deep respect for, deep affections for, deep care for. I would be willing to wager, I'd be willing to talk with you, that in the end, people we respect, and love, and honor, have feelings for are people who have been very transparent, very open, very honest about who they are, about their struggles, about their strengths, about things that have occurred in their lives, about the events that have shaped them. And so really, I don't think you can get to this brotherly affection thing until you quit pretending. Until you quit pretending. Because when you create an environment – when an environment is created – we can be honest about where we are, then there's no false bravado, there's no false boasting, there's nobody leaning against the cross going 'you guys, get right'. But we're all kind of going 'yes we're broken. Praise Christ'. Yet brotherly affections begin to flow through a place where no one is pretending they're more than they are. If anything, when people finally walk into a small group setting, or into a Christian setting, or a Church setting and go 'I can't beat this. It's owning me, and I hate it.' And through tears and almost rage about the sin in their lives they say 'I hate this, I hate this, I hate this. Christ help me' it creates in us longing and desire to see healing and wholeness in them. And listen, and once brotherly affection takes root, honor is easy. Honor is easy. Let's look at what he says next.

Let love be genuine, abhor what is evil hold fast to what is good. Love one another with brotherly affection out do one another in showing honor. Do not be slothful in zeal. Be fervent in spirit. Serve the Lord.

I learned a long time ago that one of the real key things that happens in the lives of men and women who submit their lives to the Spirit of God, is they begin to be very zealous for the things of God. And I try to gather around me men and women who are zealous for God. Almost that kind of awkward weird goofy kind of passion for Jesus. Like a couple of those guys that are on our staff – Paul Matthies, who has left to training in Co. Paul Matthies has a zeal for the things of God. And sometimes it comes off corny, man. I'm not going to lie to you. He's always doing acronyms for stuff. He's always wearing like really horrible Christian t-shirts. You know, he really does own the one that says "Spirit" but it's like the Sprite logo. "Refreshingly the one" part of the 3. It's kind of over the top, corny, goofy, but I want to be around him. Because zeal is contagious. And people who love Jesus deeply create in those of us who are weaker in faith or weaker in grace a desire to love Jesus in that way. Isn't that right?

Michael Bleeker on our staff, our worship leader here. Michael Bleeker thinks everything is great. It does not matter what movie he saw, it does not matter what CD he listened to, it does not matter where he went, it does not matter. He will go 'oh man! It was awesome! It was' Really? The train wreck was awesome? 'Yeah, because the wheels flew off' I mean, it doesn't matter what it is, he's got this kind of positive view on what occurred and what happened and the way things are. So I want to be around him. I want to be around him because I'm a critic and I'm cynical by nature. Christ help me. So to get around him, he sees the beauties that I miss because I'm critiquing. He sees the beauties that I'll miss because it's not going the way I wanted it to. He has zeal. And listen, I think that the real key to this part of the text is that "that service to the Lord line" Guys like Paul Matthies, guys like Michael Bleeker – they think that everything they're doing is serving the Lord so they're not trying to serve you, they're not trying to serve me, they're not trying to serve their neighbor. They do those things because they know in doing those things they're serving Jesus. And so there's this real zeal about the little things they do because they see it as serving Jesus.

Let's keep going.

Do not be slothful in zeal. Be fervent in the Spirit serve the Lord.

I love verse 12. Verse 12 reveals some things that happened in the Church that are true but hard. 12

Rejoice in hope

Now, I always want to be honest about the word hope. Because hope is one of those words that everyone celebrates, and it is a good thing, but it's wrought with pain and sorrow. Like if you have hope, that means things right now are not as they should be. That things right now aren't what they could be or what they should be. So if you have high hope, and a lot of hope, it means that right now can be broken. So look at what he says here, because I think that these 3 things are tied together.

Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation.

All right so now you've got this idea that debunks a lot kind of wealth and health prosperity gospel where he says here 'hey, let's be patient in hope and patient in... Let's rejoice in hope and be patient through difficult times.' Physical, emotional, spiritual. Tribulations. How do we rejoice in hope? How are we patient in tribulation? By this... look.

Be constant in (in what?) prayer

Because what ends up happening then is this. The tribulation befalls us, we begin to think that things could be better, and we're walking genuinely without hypocrisy and brotherly affection around those who are zealous. Now all of a sudden we have those who are walking with us through the most difficult times of our lives. Now all of a sudden we have testimonies of others who have been where we've been. Now all of a sudden the beauty of the body starts to function like it should. Let's finish it up.

Verse 13:

Contribute to the needs of the saints.

I think that this is an easy one once these other things are done. I mean once you have stopped pretending that you are more than you are, and you've been honest with where you've been in your Spiritual journey, about what you struggle with, about where you are, about where you're strong, about where you're weak. Once you've been honest about that, once the brotherly affections start occurring and I begin to love you and you begin to love me, and we begin to walk intimately with one another – then when I see you in need, or you see me in need – is it not a natural reaction to want to fill that? I'll bring it back to this idea of family. I mean if I see my daughter, my son, in need, I don't just hope it works out for them. I help. And then look at this. I love this. We haven't talked about dinner in a month and a half, so let's just get back into it.

Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality.

Seek to show hospitality

I love this idea of hospitality. I love this idea in my head that some of you, some of you before the service that you come to, put this pot of stew or soup or something on your stove and you make two times more than your family will need. With the whole idea of coming into this place and finding a family and inviting them over to your house. Where food can be eaten in paper bowls with plastic spoons – no one's got to do any dishes – where food can be consumed, the gospel and how it's worked in and through our lives can be told. And so the brotherly affection, and genuine love, might begin to take root over some soup and some corn bread.

So this is the command. This is the prescription of what the Church should look like. That the Church should never be a place where pretending or where people are trying to be one

thing when they're not, that it should be a place where we're honest about where we're weak, we're honest about the things that go on. This in turn creates the ability to engage one another to a serious level when sin is spotted in our lives. It creates affections for one another. It creates zeal in the life of the body. It all of a sudden creates the kind of people where we love one another enough to sacrifice our own money, our own time, our own kind of network to help those in need. It creates this place where dinner tables are always filled with laughter or tears and stories of our great God and King.

But, here's what we've got to address. This is good and all, but how in the world do you do this at the Village Church? I mean, if we're just being honest, if there were 300 of us at this neighborhood Church, this would be an easy deal. But how do you do this when there's 4,000 of us spread across six, what will probably soon be 7 services, how do you have brotherly affection for people that you never meet? I mean, with what we're running numerically right now, you could honestly come here for years and never meet half of the people who go here. I mean, how are we going to do this? Like later on in this Romans passage that we are in, finish out the chapter later on today. In this chapter later it says

Weep with those who are weeping. Rejoice with those who are rejoicing.

I mean, how's this possible? I don't even know who's weeping! I don't know who's rejoicing. How do you do this in the context that we find ourselves doing Church? How do you do this here?

Here's one way we don't do it. You don't grow into maturity in Christ by pulling away from the body and fixing yourself, and then coming into the body and try to make a difference. That's a broken, un-Biblical way of thinking. And it doesn't work. If we're not careful here at the Village and we don't really address this and attack this and make this kind of living priority for us, then we are on a very, very dangerous path of becoming some kind of weekend Bible study instead of the Church. And on my end, just as the Pastor, I've already spoken at large Bible studies. I left that a long time ago. OK so how do we do this at The Village? In the end we can't make this happen. We are so unbelievably dependent upon the Spirit of God to make these things happen. But what we can do is create venues where they have the best possible chance of happening. That's what we can do. So, how do we do that at The Village? We do that with home groups. Do you know that just about any night of the week, any night of the week, all across the DFW area – honestly – there are men and women who attend here, are members here, who gather together for Bible study, for fellowship, for community, for dumb games, I think at some point. They get together and they walk in groups that are sometimes as small as 6 and sometimes as large as 417 – no I'm kidding – but some of them are pretty big. Some of the groups are pretty big. We want you in a home group. But we don't want you in just any home group. Like one of the problems with The Village, whether we like it or not, is that we're regional. Which means that there are several hundred of you this weekend who drove all the way from Plano. That there are hundreds of you that drove all the way down from Denton. That there are hundreds of you that came up from Carrollton. We're not just a Church that just reaches Flower Mound, Lewisville, Highland Village. But you're coming from all over the place so we don't want you in just any home group.

We want you in a home group near to where you live. And so we created zones. A multitude of zones - where groups function inside a geographic zone around where people live. So, you're going to group with men and women who live near you in Plano. Who live near you in Denton. Who live near you in Carrollton. Who live near you in Flower Mound. So that when you're at the store, you might see a brother. So when you're at the mall you might see a brother. So when you're getting gas, you might see a sister. So when you go out to eat, you can pay for the meal of your pastor who you see in there eating – thanks for that Wednesday night – whoever that was. You can love on the body. You can be genuine with more effectively. And then you know what we like to do? At separate time we like to pull you together in what we call Zone Gatherings. We like to pull you together in groups of 315, no larger than that. We like to pull you together in that size venue within your geographic zones so that you can see more of the people that live around you. So you can see more of the people who are in your neighborhood. So you can get to know more of the people who Christ has brought here to serve, but live farther out, or even in this very neighborhood. This is what we're trying to do. This is what we're trying to accomplish.

So what do you do? What do you do? I mean, let me say this – it's not going to be easy. Community is not easy. We need more group leaders than we have. We've grown way too fast for us to be healthy. We need more group leaders. Tons more group leaders. We need some of you group leaders to step up to the coach level. We need you to plug in to home groups in your area. And listen, I know it's going to be hard. I know some of you have kids and you don't know what to do with your kids during those – we're working on that, I promise you. It is a priority this year for the staff of The Village to solve that issue the best we can. Do the best you can. You know what would be a great idea. You know what would be genuine in brotherly affection? For some of our singles groups, for some of our College groups. For some of these groups to offer to watch the kids of some of these. I mean, it's just an idea.

So on the way out tonight, you know about servant central. If you don't then you don't listen very well, because we tell you every week. Across the way in one of the portables there is Servant Central. You can walk over there and you can say 'I need to get in a home group, help me' and there will be people that grab you by the hand and go 'I'll walk with you until you get a group'. Or if you're going 'listen, I can't be walking all over the parking lot, I mean what is that, 50-60 yards? I can't do that' Then what you can do is out in the foyer, we've set up this table and there's these huge maps behind the table out there. Those are not ways out of the parking lot. Those are the breakdown of zones and where the groups are within the zones. Walk up to that table. Listen, do not be simply a spectator here. You harm us, no doubt. You harm us because a lot of resources, and a lot of time. You hurt the body as a whole. But more than that, you hurt your self. You rob yourself from maturity in Christ. So let love be without hypocrisy. Let's not be a place that pretends. Let home groups be that place where we can walk in and go 'this week has been miserable' or 'this week has been phenomenal' or 'I've got pornography issues' or 'Our marriage is hurting' or 'my money isn't working right now' or 'I'm struggling with this Jesus thing'. May our home groups be that place. May our zones be that place where love is without hypocrisy. Where relationships can be deep enough that we can confront

one another with the junk in each other's lives. Where brotherly affection can take root, where we can feel connected and like family. Where zeal can give birth and hospitality and good will can go out. This is the bride of Christ. This is how the culture around us begins to see the love of Christ expressed. May he make us this place. May he help us become this place. May he help your heart see the importance of it. Let's pray.

Father I thank you for these men and women and I thank you for an opportunity to open up the Scriptures and see what you have to say to us. I pray for, well I pray for men and women who are covenant members here. I pray for our home group leaders, that they might foster these kinds of environments where it's OK to not be OK. I pray for our covenant members, that they might be men and women who pursue community with this body. I pray for those who are new to The Village. I know that there's been over the last 6 – 8 weeks – about 600 or 700 people who have joined our little family or begun to attend with our little family here. I pray that on the way out, to the man to the women, they would walk over to guest central, that they would walk over to servant central. That they would walk over. That they would find out where can I plug in? I pray that we would be patient in the process of trying to find this kind of community. That we would be faithful in working towards this community, and that the heartbeat of the Village church would always be smaller, intimate settings, where people can know one another deeply and spiritually, be challenged by the truths of Scripture, and be held accountable to observing them. Help us. These things are bigger than us. Help us. We can't create these things. We need your help father. Truly make us the Church. And it's for your beautiful name I pray. Amen.