

COMMUNITY

IS OUR MIDDLE NAME

Connect

If you could come up with a name for a group of animals (e.g., a flamboyance), what animals would you name, and what would you call them?

Review

Take a couple of minutes to review some of the main ideas from the sermon:

1. **We want closeness without the mess.** Real community isn't found by avoiding inconvenience, vulnerability, or conflict but by embracing them. Humility, gentleness, patience, and bearing with one another are what enable us to experience the belonging we long for.
2. **We want unity without a new center.** True unity cannot be built around preferences, personalities, politics, or secondary beliefs because those things eventually divide us. Lasting community is only possible when Jesus is our shared center.
3. **Belonging is worth every effort.** Pursuing genuine community takes intentional effort, but it is always worth it. We make every effort to pursue unity because Jesus first made every effort to bring us into God's family.

Read Ephesians 4:1-6

As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. ² Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. ³ Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. ⁴ There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; ⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism; ⁶ one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

Make Observations: After reading Ephesians 4:1-6 out loud, give your group a few minutes to make observations on their own. Then go around the group and share the things you observed and discuss them.

Discuss

1. The sermon pointed out the modern tendency to isolate. Where in your own life have you noticed technology or convenience (streaming, delivery, remote work, AI, etc.) making it easier to stay isolated? What would it look like to push back against that in your own life?
2. Of the four postures Paul lists in verse 2 (humble not self-serving, gentle not harsh, patient not pushy, bearing the load not running away), which one is hardest for you personally? What tends to happen in your relationships when that one is missing?
3. Pastor Clayton shared a simple formula for experiencing closeness in relationships: Closeness = **Time** x **Vulnerability** (sharing hard things) x **Struggle** (taking on burdens/needs) x **Resolved Conflict** (working through hard things). Which of these variables might you need more of in your current relationships?
4. Paul lists seven things that unite believers (one body, Spirit, hope, Lord, faith, baptism, God/Father) instead of things like politics, worship style, or shared background. What "false centers" are you tempted to build community around, and what would it look like to recenter on what Paul describes instead?
5. Are there ways we can be better at helping each other experience belonging within our own Community Group? What would that look like?

Apply

Break up into smaller groups of three, and respond to this question:

- What kind of intentional effort do you want to make in investing more deeply in community and relationships in your life? What's one simple step you can take this week?

Pray

Ask God to identify one relationship or community you've avoided entering into the "mess" with. Take a minute in the quiet to silently confess that before God.

Then, have one person close in prayer by asking God for the courage to practice humility, gentleness, patience, and endurance in our relationships.