

Sermon – OUR Father in Heaven
Sunday April 30, 2023

Let's play a game. I'll give you step-by-step instructions for something. And you'll guess what it is, okay?

First, you take your smartphone. Then you hold it away from you at a 45-degree angle. Make sure you have good lighting. Look at your smartphone, raise your eyebrow a little and make a knowing smile. And then CLICK!

What are we doing? We're taking a selfie.

The selfie has become a global phenomenon.

- Each day, 92 million selfies are taken.
- Each year, people spend 54 hours taking selfies.
- Over 95% of young adults have taken a selfie.
- And get this - since 2008, there have been almost 400 selfie-related deaths.

Selfies are a great way to capture moments. Sociologists have called this generation the "selfie generation". They say that the selfie has become the ultimate symbol of individualism.

What's individualism? Individualism is a me-first mentality. It emphasizes my personal rights and freedoms. It prioritizes my needs and preferences over others. Individualism says:

- I will shape my own destiny and determine my own goals.
- I'll decide how I'm going to live and do what makes me happy.
- And if anyone tells me what to do or they threaten my rights, I will fight back with everything in me!

Individualism has led to many good things: celebrating diversity, focusing on personal growth and advocating for human rights.

But here's the problem. **You and I are created for community, so when community breaks down, so do we.** We see this all around us.

- Broken relationships and divided communities.
- Social isolation and mental health problems.
- Lack of empathy and concern for others, especially people we disagree with.

Individualism is at an all-time high. We're more lonely, divided and self-absorbed than ever.

You and I are created for community, so when community breaks down, so do we.

Theologian David Wells puts it like this: **"If the natural logic of Enlightenment thinking is the expressive individualism of our time, then that logic has brought us not freedom but a painful captivity to ourselves. And in the end, the collapse of this grand experiment in building a Kingdom of God without God has been replaced by a new Kingdom, one in which the self has ascended the throne from which God has been dislodged... this very crowning of self has created this crisis because in placing**

everything in our self, we soon discover a terrifying sense that while all we have is the self, the self really does not amount to too much.” (David Wells)

Sobering words indeed. So how do you and I resist the cultural pressure of individualism in our world?

We’re in a series called *Pray Like Jesus*. In this series, we’re unpacking the Lord’s Prayer and looking at how Jesus teaches us how to pray.

To help you with this, we’ve put together some great resources for you.

First, you can get a copy of **The Lord’s Prayer Guide**. You’ll find helpful reflections and prayer points based on the Lord’s Prayer. You can get your copy at the Welcome Centre after service while supplies last or download a copy using the information on the screen.

<https://cornerstonechurch.ca/lordsprayerguide>

You can also sign-up for **The Prayer Practice**. This is a 4-session Semester Group that Pastor Steve is running. You’ll learn how to create daily rhythms of prayer that will help you experience God’s presence in your life. Check out the link on the screen to get information.

<https://cornerstonechurch.ca/prayer-practice/>

Please take advantage of these great resources and opportunities. Now before we get into our message, let’s all stand and let’s all pray the prayer Jesus taught his disciples to pray which is on the screen.

Our Father in heaven,

may your name be kept holy.

¹⁰ **May your Kingdom come soon.**

May your will be done on earth,

as it is in heaven.

¹¹ **Give us today the food we need,^[a]**

¹² **and forgive us our sins,**

as we have forgiven those who sin against us.

¹³ **And don’t let us yield to temptation,^[b]**

but rescue us from the evil one.^[c]

(Matthew 6:9-13, NLT)

The Lord’s Prayer is familiar to many of us. It starts with a small but strategic word. We don’t say *My* Father in heaven. What do we say? We say *Our* Father in heaven.

Jesus is reminding us that the starting point for prayer isn’t ME. It’s God and his plan to restore the world *through* his people.

Cyprian was the Bishop of Carthage in the 3rd Century. He wrote a commentary on the Lord’s Prayer and says: ***Our Father means that we do not pray as individuals but in community. Since we are all children of the same Father, our prayer is not private but communal.*** (Cyprian)

New Testament professor David Timms says, **This tiny word *our* forms an immediate bridge between you and me. It speaks of a shared experience and a shared ownership. It speaks of community... *Our* calls us back to others. It forces *me* to consider *us*. *Me and God* creates a cocoon that isolates me from**

others and ironically from God. *Us and the Father* reinforces the indispensability of community. (David Timms)

Historically, individualism is a radical idea because people have identified themselves with their tribe and their community. But putting my interests above others has become the guiding principle of our times.

Yet as Christians, Jesus calls us to live differently.

Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect. (Romans 12:2, NLT)

Today we're going to talk about community. What I want to do is look at three ways the word *our* challenges the individualism in our culture and then look at how we can be God's relational people in the world.

First, the word *our* challenges our consumer mentality.

Individualism has turned us into consumers. How many of you have heard the saying, *the customer is always right*?

Businesses will now customize and cater their products to your individual needs. You can buy a can of Coke with your name on it, you can custom design your Nike sneakers, you can create phone covers with your favourite images. Apple even reminds us of that their product names – the iPhone, the iPad, the iPod.

As a customer, it's all about me and the customer is always right. If you don't meet my needs, I'll just find someone who will. But this thinking isn't just limited to our shopping. It also shows up in the church.

We say things like:

- What did I get out of this sermon?
- Do I like the worship style and song choices?
- Does this church feed me?
- Are there programs that meet my needs?

Win Arn, a church consultant surveyed one thousand churches and their members. He found that a whopping 89% of church members believe that the number one purpose of a church is to "take care of my needs and my family."

But what if a church fails to do that? I'll just move on to the next church. Don't we have a term for that? What do we call that? Church shopping.

This isn't to say you should never look for another church. This isn't to say there isn't a place to discern a church's spiritual fit.

All this is just to highlight a growing problem. Spiritual consumerism is threatening the health of God's church.

But the word *our* is a corrective. It reminds us, it's not about me.

Turn to your neighbour and tell them, It's not about you.

In Genesis 12, God tells Abraham that he's going to bless him.

**"I will make you into a great nation,
and I will bless you;
I will make your name great,
and you will be a blessing.^[a]
³ I will bless those who bless you,
and whoever curses you I will curse;
and all peoples on earth
will be blessed through you." (Genesis 12:2-3)**

God promises to bless Abraham with all these great blessings. But who are these blessing for? Are they for Abraham? Are they for his family?

God blesses Abraham not so he can *keep* the blessing. God blesses Abraham so that he can *be* a blessing. So that the whole world will be blessed through him.

Do you realize that's our purpose as well? At Cornerstone, we say that we're a *so that* people. **We're blessed so that we can be a blessing.**

You see, we don't exist for our personal fulfillment. We don't exist to live a comfortable life. We exist for the sake of others.

This is how Jesus calls us to live. We're to:

- Serve others in humility.
- Care for the poor and needy.
- Put the interests of others above our own.
- And use our time, talent and treasure not just for ourselves, but for the sake of others.

The word *our* reminds us that we don't exist for ourselves, we exist for the sake of others.

Second, the word *our* challenges our individualistic faith.

Faith in Jesus is personal. When you make a decision to follow Jesus it's a personal one because no one can do that for you. So we have a personal faith but it's not an individualistic faith because **Personal faith in Jesus must be expressed and experienced in community.**

Think of a cross. There's a vertical beam and a horizontal beam. The vertical beam represents our relationship with God. The horizontal beam represents our relationship with others.

Individualism emphasizes the vertical relationship. It's just me and God. I pray and read my Bible. I listen to worship songs in the car. So I'm good.

But a cross with only one beam is a pole. The horizontal relationship is also needed. In the New Testament, whenever we read the pronoun *you*, we assume it's used in the singular. We think the Bible is telling me what I need to grow in my relationship with Jesus.

But here's the thing. This pronoun is almost always used in the plural. In other words, they're not instructions to individual Christians, they're instructions to Christians gathering together in community.

These letters would have been read to groups of Christians who formed the early church. They would hear these letters and then they would ask questions and talk about them. They would share their lives and learn from each other. They would eat together and pray together.

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. (Acts 2:42)

That's why if you're serious about your faith, you need to be in community. That's where small groups come in. Small groups are an important part of our discipleship. Small groups are where we do life together and encourage each other in our faith.

If you're not in a small group, consider signing up for **Group Launch**. We're running our next one in May. **[Show Group Launch slide]**

Group Launch is a 90-minute event and a great opportunity to have fun, get to know others and get launched into a 7-week Starter Group.

You'll get a Group-in-a-Box kit that has everything you need to start a group. And the 7 sessions, group members can decide if they want to continue as a group.

So if you're not connected in a group, check out our page for more information.

<https://cornerstonechurch.ca/smallgroups>

Because the word *our* reminds us that our personal faith is always expressed and experienced in community.

Third, the word *our* challenges our self-reliance.

It's not easy for us to depend on others. People hurt you and disappoint you. People frustrate you and create problems for you. People take time and dealing with them feels inefficient and unproductive.

Let's face it - people are messy. And it often feels like they get in the way of our goals.

Is it any wonder then that we want to be self-reliant?

And yet as messy as people can be, the truth is **we can't thrive apart from life-giving relationships.**

The Apostle Paul talks about our need for each other:

The human body has many parts, but the many parts make up one whole body. So it is with the body of Christ...

¹⁸ Our bodies have many parts, and God has put each part just where he wants it. ¹⁹ How strange a body would be if it had only one part! ²⁰ Yes, there are many parts, but only one body. ²¹ The eye can never say to the hand, "I don't need you." The head can't say to the feet, "I don't need you."

... So God has put the body together such that extra honor and care are given to those parts that have less dignity... so that all the members care for each other. ²⁶ If one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it, and if one part is honored, all the parts are glad.

²⁷ All of you together are Christ's body, and each of you is a part of it.

1 Corinthians 12:12, 18-21, 24-27

In our culture, it's not a good thing to be "needy." And yet here is Paul saying, you're "needy." You need mutual interdependent relationships. You need to rely on each other. You need the support you get in community.

How many of you have ever seen the redwood trees in California? Our family visited there a few years ago. These trees are some of the tallest trees in the world. The most famous of them is General Sherman. It's 275 feet tall, 36 feet in diameter and over 2,500 years old.

So how have these redwood trees survived all these years? How many of you think it's because they have deep roots?

You would think so but their roots are actually shallow. These trees weigh 500 tons, stand hundreds of feet tall and have lived for thousands of years and yet their roots go down only 10 feet.

So how have these redwood trees survived for thousands of years? The answer? They grow close together in thick groves. In other words, they grow in community.

You see, redwoods never survive alone because they depend on the nutrients they get from each other. When they're close together, their roots intertwine and fuse together, extending for up to 100 feet wide.

California is known for massive earthquakes, strong winds and raging floods. But when these storms hit, redwoods are still standing. Why? Because their roots are interconnected and so redwood trees literally hold each other up.

Do you realize that you and I are redwood trees. We can't stand on our own. We need the care, encouragement and prayer support we get in community. Our roots need to connect so that when the storms of life hit, we hold each other up.

Merry's Story

I want to tell you Merry's story. In August of 2020, Merry had just separated from her husband. It was one of the darkest and most painful times for her. She was struggling with her identity and didn't know what to do. She didn't have a church and she didn't have family here. But she was looking for community. She was looking for a place to belong.

Her counsellor told her about Cornerstone and she got connected. She heard about Group Launch and decided to sign-up. But she had social anxiety and many fears. One of them being, what will the group think of me when they found out about my divorce?

But her fears quickly melted away when she met her group. Instead of feeling judged, she felt loved and accepted. She noticed that everyone came with baggage but everyone was welcomed with open arms by Jesus and by the group.

Even with the burden of being a single mom going through a divorce, she never felt alone. Her family might have been back home, but she had found a new family - her small group. Group members walked with her, cried with her and prayed with her. They brought care packages and dropped off meals. They picked her up and drove her family to church. When she got baptized, they were there with gifts and flowers and hugs.

What makes Merry's story so powerful isn't just all the support she received. It's how it's inspired her to support others. She finds great joy in caring for her group members just as she was cared for. She loves serving the community and doing outreach with her group. And as a group, they've decided that they will always make space for people looking to belong. In their two years as a group, they've invited 7 people to join them, though different members have come and gone. In fact this past week, they've invited a new couple to join them.

Merry would say that she would not be here had it not been for the love and support of her small group. Merry found a community to hold her up during her storm. And she's decided that she will be there to hold others up as well.

Prayer was a big part of Merry journey. It's also an important way to hold each other up. After service today we're going to have a time of prayer ministry. Anyone who's wants prayer can come up and receive prayer. We'll give more instructions later.

But just as Merry's story illustrates, the word *our* reminds us that we can't make it on our own. We need the connected relationships so that when the storms of life hit, we hold each other up.

You and I are created for community, so when community breaks down, so do we.

Individualism didn't just show up in our world overnight. In the 16th century, French philosopher Rene Descartes famously said, *Cogito Ergo Sum* - I think therefore I am. This statement laid the groundwork for the Enlightenment which has shaped Western civilization for centuries around the rights of the individual.

So how do we resist this powerful force?

Reverend Wesley Granberg-Michaelson says, **"We can't underestimate the insidious pressures of the selfish individualism in our society. It seeks to shape our lives in so many ways. And those pressures can't be resisted alone. It takes a community of brothers and sisters called by the transforming vision of life together as Christ's body to nurture a spiritual journey toward freedom and the heresy of individualism."**

Community is the context for living as followers of Jesus.

There's an old South African proverb called Ubuntu. Ubuntu says, "I am a person through other people. My humanity is tied to yours."

Archbishop Desmond Tutu explains it like this: Ubuntu is the essence of being human. It speaks particularly about the fact that you can't exist as a human being in isolation. It speaks about our

interconnectedness ... We think of ourselves far too frequently as just individuals, separated from one another, whereas you are connected and what you do affects the whole world. Ubuntu doesn't say, 'I think therefore I am.' Ubuntu says, 'I am a human because I belong.'"

So every time we use the word *our*, let us remember the importance of community, let us affirm our commitment to remain together and let us declare that we belong to our Heavenly Father and to our brothers and sisters in his family.

Benediction

God has planted in your heart a deep longing for community because you were created to be a relational being by a relational God.

Therefore we don't say, I think therefore I am. We say, I am human because I belong.

So let's reaffirm our commitment to each other as you receive the benediction:

... let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching. (Hebrews 10:24-25) Amen

Dismissal/Instructions for Prayer Ministry

We're going to have a time of Prayer Ministry now.

[Create Prayer Request slide for online guests – see link below]

If you're watching online and you have a prayer need, please share it with us using the information on the screen. Our prayer team will be happy to pray for you this week.

<https://www.cornerstonechurch.ca/prayer>

At this time, I'd like to invite the Prayer Ministers to come up.

Now if you're here in person and you would like prayer, please come up to any one of our Prayer Ministers here at the front. You can share your prayer need with them and they'll be happy to pray for you.

For the rest of you, I invite you to quietly make your way back out to the café area so that we don't disturb the prayer ministry here.

Thank you all for worshipping with us today and have a great week!