

I've been talking with many of you about what's coming up. Maybe it's what you're looking at for residence life in the fall. Maybe it's about housing. Maybe it's about your summer plans and employment or internships and practicums. Jobs that, are they panning out? Are they not panning out? I'm not sure.

There's much that's going on. I wanna start this way this morning, and that's in prayer for you all and also in prayer for our time together this morning. So bow your heads with me as we pray.

Lord, we thank you for who you are. We thank you for who you are to us. We thank you for this community that we have the privilege to participate in. God, I thank you for our life together and our life in you. Lord, I pray as we continue in our time of worship this morning that any words that I have this morning, that they would be your words.

Lord, I pray that as we open the Bible this morning that you would use it to speak to us. God, even if there's just one question or one sentence that you want to use to reach us this morning, I pray you would give us open ears, fertile soil on our hearts and on our minds to hear what you have for us. So, Lord, we pray that you would, by your Holy Spirit, join us now in this space and go with us into the weekend. As we near the close of the semester. We pray these things in your name. Amen.

I had an unusually tough time discerning what to share with you all this morning. Often, as I have the privilege of speaking with you, and it feels like it's been 100 years since January, but it's only been a couple of months, I really make an effort to hear from many of you, hear what's going on in your lives, the conversations that we have together, I try and make connections. I try to find patterns of, well, what's going on here and maybe over here for this circle of friends or for this individual or for these folks over here? And I try and assess what are the patterns of what life together is like during this specific season here at Cairn. And then I pray on that and I think on that. I ask the Lord to give me maybe words of encouragement or words of challenge for our community and for our life together.

But perhaps it's just the season that we're in. I'm not sure, but I couldn't make sense of a pattern for this morning based on those conversations. And I think that maybe speaks to how many different types of things are going on for you all. There's probably a takeaway within that itself, but that's not what I'm getting at this morning. Where I landed at though was I want to pivot back to what I said about what type of winter and what type of spring I've had.

I want to share just personally for a quick moment to then inform where we're going this morning with the message. My family and, and my community around me growing up, we, we lost, uh, 5 different loved ones over the course of the winter and the spring, uh, over the last few months, which is odd. As an adult, I've had people in my life, whether family or friends, who have passed away, um, but there was an unusually high volume of that in my life. And in this case, many of them knew the Lord. There was much celebration of life that happened, but there's also a fair amount of the human response of grief within that.

And in my thinking on sharing with you all this morning, I kept being brought back to those moments. I sat through those celebration of life services, those memorial services, through much of the late winter and spring. And I kept bringing— I was, I was. And for whatever reason, as I prepared, I was being brought back to this imagery of this journey that we're all on.

In our life, and bear with me for this one, I'm gonna try and paint a picture, a word picture for you. I don't have a diagram on this. I didn't rely on Gemini or whatever to do that. I'm gonna paint a word picture for you here of the way that I'm thinking about this journey that we're all on. In our lives, there's this physical, physiological middle. And there's also our spiritual middle, a baseline, if you will, a place where we begin at some point in time, not when we gain consciousness or things like that, but where we begin our journey throughout our days.

As we are journeying, we're not just moving forward in time, but hopefully we're moving, in our case, right, more and more into sanctification and into life in Christ. Now, life is not linear. It does not move in just one straight upward line of Sanctification upward, yes. No turning back, no mistakes, no

bumps, no doubling back for any reason, right? It's not linear at all though, we know that.

Whether it's spiraling or zigzagging or whatever it is, we're all somewhere on a nonlinear path. Maybe something of a spiral even. Maybe we're making some mistakes. I don't know, I'm for you guys, not for me obviously, but maybe you guys are. Maybe you're taking wrong turns.

Maybe you've had to double back and recover some ground and tread the same steps you've taken before, and that can be frustrating. But the overall trajectory of that path and of that journey, it matters. And there's two directions that we can spiral. And as I'm sitting in these memorial services, I can't— I don't know why I keep thinking on this imagery, but the one direction that we can go is upward, toward communion with God, toward community with others who know him and who are created in his image toward life. We are spiraling upward in this nonlinear journey that we have together toward life and toward life in Christ.

And then the reverse of that is spiraling downward, a harder thing to come to grips with, but this reality where even if we're not caught in the vortex of this, but at times spiraling away from God toward isolation, which is something we'll come back to in a moment. Toward believing the enemy's oldest lie over our lives, that you're alone, that no one is there, and that God is far off.

You see, the enemy Satan's goal in our lives is not just sin and that sin may abound. It's for us as created beings, as image bearers, to be deceived into isolation. Because in isolation, in the echo chambers of ourselves, that's where the lies can begin to take root in our minds and in our hearts. And the lies, when they are left unchallenged, they lead toward death. That could be spiritual death, that could be emotional death, that could be relational or social death, and it could be physical death.

But I was reflecting on this paradigm where we're spiraling in a direction, but is it into communion with God and community with others, or is it into isolation away from others and away from God. So this morning, the ques— the question, excuse me, isn't just— it's not— I'm not asking something that would be asked in youth group or something early on, right? It's not just, where are you going when you die? That's not what I'm only asking. It's, which direction are you journeying right now?

Said in a different way, I want you to ask this question, and I want you to be— and it doesn't have to be this morning as you sit here, but As you go this morning, I want you to be introspective, reflecting, evaluating your life a little bit to think about how are you responding to God.

If I can get the A.W. Tozer quote in his *book, The Knowledge of the Holy*. A.W. Tozer writes this, "What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us."

Let me show you where I'm going here. I want to retread some ground from our last time together on God and who God is and community. We talked previously, but we know that God exists in the Trinity— Father, Son, Holy Spirit. For eternity past to eternity future, he has been unchanging in his modeling of community to all creation. The Bible tells us too that God is love, and we know philosophically speaking that love requires what? It requires an object. It requires another.

And so if God is love, God then also in many ways introduces us to and is in his essence, he is community. So the very essence of God being love is rooted in communion and in community, right? And not like the Eucharist communion, like communion, like actually being together, being in the presence of the Lord. Go to the next step of the Trinity, right? To Jesus the Son, Emmanuel.

That name is God with us, God incarnate. Jesus's life, his death, his resurrection are a historical and living example of a God whose essence is community. Who chose life with us, who chose human parents, who chose 12 disciples to journey with. And Jesus's work on the cross was to make possible what? Our communion with God.

And then the Holy Spirit, who is the helper, the advocate, the one who comes alongside, the companion, whatever your translation is. God uses our human language through his word to help us understand this third person. Of the Godhead, who in its very essence is also in community with us,

because the Holy Spirit— what? Dwells within us. Living, dwelling, living within us.

That's an inherently communal thing. And our helper in our community with God in our everyday life and in our life together. God is community. He models community, and he has given us the gift of communion with him and community with others that we may be spiraling upwards towards life in him. And this is why I'm unapologetic about having the department called Community Life.

This is why I will just beat that drum all day long, because I think it's one of the most important things about this life together. I, by nature of working at a higher education institution, I do sign off on academics and education and getting a degree and being equipped for the goal— the calling that God has placed on your life. That is our, in many ways, primary focus. But this aspect of life together and the fact that there is learning to be done within that, that community life, it's massive. We don't graduate from that.

We only go to the next stage of what that looks like. And that's why I ask the question of how are we responding to God, because it matters Today, with 3 weeks remaining in the semester, with papers and projects and finals looming, it matters now. And it will matter in 13 years when you're getting together with friends and talking about the Cairn Days and you're going to your own churches and you're working in the work that God has placed before you, whether in your home or out of the home or whatever that is. Community life, we don't get to graduate from, but we need to be building those skills now and working on an upward spiral towards life in him and towards life together.

I want to look at some biblical examples then of responding to God. I want to see if any of these resonate with you the way that they did with me. And so it's going to be a little bit of a biblical survey, but you can open your Bibles with me to Genesis 3. That's where we're going to start, and we're going to go through a number of different stories on human beings in the biblical narrative who are responding in certain ways to God. And many of these are use cases for us to learn from. Genesis 3:8-10.

This is Adam and Eve we're talking about. And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day. And the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. But the Lord God called to the man and said to him, "Where are you?" And he said, "I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked and I hid myself.

We've actually covered this, actually from a different angle recently in chapel, but before the fall, Adam and Eve walk with God in the garden. Perfect communion. You know this, you guys have all taken BIV 100. Perfect community. There's no shame, there's no hiding, there's no distance or perceived distance.

And then through deception, sin enters. Right? And the very first thing that happens isn't punishment. That's not the first thing that happens. It's the hiding.

The hiding is the first thing that happens. And we think we want to go right to the punishment because we fear that. We don't like that. We don't want to think about that, and that's a tough one. That's going to happen.

That's over here. The consequences are coming, but it's the hiding that happens first. That is our instinctual reaction. They hid themselves from the presence of the Lord. That's what shame does.

Shame does that. Sin does that. There's a reason why church calls it secret sin or hidden sin sometimes, because the shame surrounding it feeds us the lies. It tells us that God doesn't want to see us, that we're too far gone, that what we've done with our words, what we've done with our choices, what we've done with our actions, what we've done in all those aspects of our lives, that we have to cover ourselves before we can potentially even come near to a holy and to a perfect God.

So Adam and Eve actually serve in this way as our first example of what responding to God can look

like. But I want us to look for a moment at God's disposition towards man and woman versus their posture towards God.

Here we have the sin that enters the world. And it's not God who is going scorched earth and burning things up saying, "Where are you? I need to talk to you." It's, "Where are you?" He— Dr. Williams said this, I think, in his— maybe 2 chapel messages ago. We're talking about an omniscient God, a God who knows everything, who is all-powerful. This isn't a question of actually, "Well, where are you?

I don't know where you are." He's not asking because he wants the answer. He's asking to posture himself towards his creation. "Where are you?" And for man and woman, they're not ready for that. They're not ready for that yet. And so it's hiding for them, right?

This is the enemy's first move, not just, again, to get them to sin, but to get them to hide. Because, again, in that hiding, they lose the very thing that they were made for. Were, which is communion with God. And it's well laid out also how then there's also a rift between Adam and Eve in this portion of it as well. So it's not just communion with God that has been harmed, it's also community with one another.

So let me ask you this morning, and we'll come and revisit these questions all at the end again, but for yourself, for you to think on.

Where are you hiding? What are you hiding? What have you covered over with time? What have you covered over with distraction that's creating distance between you and God and between you and the people around you?

Maybe you and the people around you who might be ready to approach you, uh, with accountability or with forgiveness to help spiral you up towards life in him. But in our shame and in our guilt, we're not ready for that.

Our response to these types of questions informs us what we think about God. We don't have to wonder. Our response to these questions tell us that. That's what part of our response to God is, right? Are we thinking rightly about who he is and about who he is to us?

Let's keep going. Let's look at another example. Turn over to Exodus 20. In Exodus 20:18-21, we're going to meet the Israelites, and we'll pop over as well to Deuteronomy 5, similar narrative that we're in here in both of these places. But Exodus 20:18-21 says this: Now when all the people, the Israelite people, saw the thunder and the flashes of lightning and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking, the people were afraid and trembled, and they stood far off and said to Moses, 'You speak to us and we'll listen, but do not let God speak to us lest we die.' Moses said to the people, 'Do not fear, for God has come to test you, that the fear of him may be before you, that you may not sin.' The people stood far off while Moses drew near to the thick darkness where God was.

Pop over then to Deuteronomy 5, and again coming from the perspective of Moses now, a short time later: The Lord spoke with you face to face at the mountain out of the midst of the fire while I stood between the Lord and you at that time to declare to you the word of the Lord.' This is Moses speaking. 'For you were afraid because of the fire and you did not go up into the mountain.' These two are kind of put together here, but I want to underline that in Sunday school this story gets very Moses-centric very quick. But in reality, let's not miss the fact that God has called the whole people up the mountain to meet with him as he is manifesting his presence on top of the mountain. Yes, in a somewhat terrifying way as we read, but the invitation is extended to all of the people. It wasn't just for Moses, "You come on up here." We read clearly what the people's posture is towards this, but we know what God is saying.

So think about, in the same way that we thought about man and woman and their posture towards God and God's posture towards us, Look at God's posture towards his people. I want to be with you. I'm inviting you, come up and be with me. And they refuse. The holiness of God is too much.

They send Moses in their place. You go for us. You hear from God. You bring back whatever he has down to us, and then we'll listen. We can listen to you, that's fine.

They're gathered together. They are on mission, so to speak. They think they're doing the right thing. They're in community down here. You commune up there, we'll commune down here, and we'll get back together after the fact.

But they've substituted proximity for presence, and we've talked about this one before. They are near each other, the people and their God, but they have chosen distance rather than choosing to be in the presence of the one true God.

And we know this, but what fills that vacuum of that space? Because they have not chosen true presence, they've only chosen nearness or proximity. What fills that vacuum? It's the golden calf. It's an idol.

This too, then, is the danger for us all. Uh, you can be proximate, you can be in chapel, uh, Monday and Friday, you can be in a Bible study that meets in your hall, you can be eating in the MAC together, doing the rhythms of care and community, even the rhythms that we have that are explicitly Christian, and still be sending someone else up the mountain in your place.

You won't graduate from that. You'll have the opportunity to fall into that even when you leave here and you are part of a local church, as you continue to be part of a local church. And it's, well, it's my small group leader, it's my pastor, they're the— they're— they are— they're good people. They're spending time with the Lord all the time, and I meet with them, and we kind of theologize or make our relationship with God very academic and learned, but instead it's not experiential, and it's not about the relationship that we personally have with him. We let someone else go up the mountain for us, or we even ask that of that— of them passively by who they are in the church.

How are you responding to God and to his invitation into his presence?

Turn with me to Jonah 1. Jonah 1:1-3. There's whole chapel messages that could come out of this one, but we're only going to spend a short time here. It says this: Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it, for their evil has come up before me." But Jonah rose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. He went down to Joppa and found a ship going to Tarshish.

He paid the fare and he went down into it to go with them to Tarshish, away from the presence of the Lord. Doesn't take a genius to read this and understand what Jonah's response is here, but let's unpack this a little bit more for our sake this morning. Jonah knows God. Jonah is a prophet. There's relationship already here.

He's doing work on God's behalf to his people. And now God is asking him to do work on behalf of the Lord to not God's people as he goes to Nineveh. He's calling him towards a community of people in Nineveh, and what does Jonah do? He runs the opposite direction. Why?

Because he doesn't want God to be merciful to them. It's a little bit of the— so if Adam and Eve are— or that's maybe not the best example, But this makes me think of the older brother in the prodigal son, this moment right here. It's, okay, I can be a prophet in this context, but Nineveh, look at how they're living. I know what you're gonna do. You're gonna have me reach out to these people, and then we're gonna go a different direction.

What if we chose to wipe these people out, right? I'm taking liberties, but right, this could be Jonah's heart in the matter. It's because he believes he knows better than God. It's not just fear of the thing or fear of the Ninevites. It's actually maybe some element of, "We've been doing the right thing here.

I'm doing the right thing. They are not. Let's deal with that. Let's have some justice here," because his version of justice looks different than what God wants to do in the story that he is telling. So what

underlying prejudice might be here between the culture that Jonah is inherently bringing and what God is calling him to?

Does that inform some of the running as well?

The Ninevites are unrighteous. In Jonah's mind, they don't deserve what God wants to give them, and underneath that could be something ugly, the kind of cultural contempt or hatred that masquerades as righteousness. "Well, I'm doing the right thing." God calls us not just into communion with him but into community with others. Including others who are not like us, others we might rather see judged than loved, if we really are honest with ourselves. And when we run from that call, we end up in the belly of our own isolation, in the dark, in the deep, maybe, wondering how we got here and how did this thing get turned around.

So my question for you all this morning in thinking on that Is there a community or a person or a group that God is calling you to? You heard from some missions teams this morning. I know many of you are involved in ministry over the course of the summer, in your everyday lives. Who are the people that God is calling you to? God calls people to people, to groups of people.

It's not often that he calls you to a location like this, but he's calling him to the people of Nineveh, who he's calling him to. Who are the people that God is calling you to?

Which direction are you running? Are you running towards what God is calling you to? Are you feet firm planted, paralyzed, very still, not wanting to move either direction, non-committal? Are you running the opposite direction? What's Nineveh for us?

What is it for you? And do you think that you know better than than God? And have you tested your thoughts against the community around you to find out that we don't know better than him?

One last one this morning for the season of the Christian calendar that we're in, in the third week of Easter here. Turn with me to Luke 24. Luke 24:13-35. Bear with me, it's a long passage, but one worth our time reading.

The day they're talking about right at the beginning here is the day of the resurrection. That very day, two of them were going to a village named Emmaus, about 7 miles from Jerusalem, and they were talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing together, Jesus himself drew near and went with them, but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. And he said to them, 'What is this conversation that you're holding with each other as you walk?' And they stood still, looking sad. Then one of them named Cleopas answered him, 'Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened in these days?' And he said to them, 'What things?' That's hilarious.

And they said to him, 'Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, a man who was a prophet, mighty in deed and word before God and all the people.' and how our chief priests and rulers delivered him up to be condemned to death and crucified him. But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things happened. Moreover, some women of our company amazed us. They were at the tomb early in the morning, and when they did not find his body, they came back saying that they had even seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive.

'Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but him they did not see.' And he said to them, 'O foolish ones and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ— that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?' And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself. 'But note, the reveal has not happened yet. It's just some guy in their eyes interpreting these things to them.' So they, the three of them, draw near to the village to which they were going. He acted as if he were going farther, but they urged him strongly, saying, 'Stay with us, for it is toward evening and the day is now far spent.' So he went in to stay with them.

When he was at the table with them, he took the bread and blessed and broke it and gave it to them, And their eyes were opened, and they recognized him. And he vanished from their sight. They said to each other, "Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?" And they rose that same hour and returned to Jerusalem. And they found the 11 and those who were with them gathered together, saying, "The Lord has risen indeed and has appeared to Simon Then they told what had happened on the road and how he was known to them in the breaking of the bread. A familiar story, the road to Emmaus, two disciples walking away from Jerusalem.

As we read, they've read— they've heard, sorry, they've heard the report of the resurrection. But in verse 11, it was never on the screen, which is okay, but they called it an idle tale. When Mary Magdalene and Joanna and Mary the mother of James come back telling them what they found, the observed reality of the resurrection at the tomb, this moment with angels, the group there— Peter goes back to look, it says— but the group there calls it an "idle tale." And here they are then on this 7-mile journey somewhat northwest of Jerusalem, and they're grieving.

I have some images of art depictions of the road to Emmaus here this morning from different times and from different cultures around the world.

But they're grieving, right? It even says as Jesus, although they don't recognize him, appears to them and asks them, "What are you guys talking about?" They're like— they start saying it, but they're sad.

They're confused. They're moving in some ways in the wrong direction, literally away from where the community of disciples is gathered, yes, but more than that, moving away from the truth of what has actually happened. And Jesus does what? He meets them on the road. This is the posture of God in Christ Jesus towards us.

He meets us on the road. He walks with them these miles. He opens the Scriptures to them. And at a certain point, they come to where they're going, and he makes as if he's going to go further. And they pursue, though.

They say, "Stay with us." They invite him in. They sit down together. They break bread together. They experience community life together. And it's in that moment, it's in the seeking and in the pursuit and in the invitation and the breaking of bread together, that's when their eyes are opened and they recognize him, Jesus, sitting with them.

Go to the Rembrandt, the very last one. Look at this guy. This is called Supper at Emmaus, which is an interesting interpretation. But here on the right is the depiction of Jesus. We can know that by the glowing.

Look at this guy as he then makes the realization once he's broken bread. He's like, holy smokes!

It's in the seeking, it's in the pursuit, it's in the breaking of bread together that their eyes are opened, right? Then they get up within the hour, nearly immediately they get up and they go back to Jerusalem to to pursue what? To pursue community with those who know the truth. Back toward community, back toward others, spiraling upward together towards life in him. This is the turn.

This is what the upward journey looks like in practice. It's not, and we tell it or we read it this way and it feels like a dramatic mountaintop moment. This was dinner. This was dinner after a 2-hour and 15-minute walk. Right?

It was dinner. It wasn't necessarily a mountaintop— it became a mountaintop experience because of what it was, but the simple yes or the simple invitation didn't feel like that before they know— before they knew who they were speaking to.

Just two people who chose to invite Jesus in, to sit down together, to be present, and everything changed. The paradigm fully shifted.

So we're a small number of weeks away from the close of our spring semester together. Summer on the other side of that, and we felt summer the last few days, especially in the Highlands or the Great Room. We felt it.

But we're at a pretty natural transition point right now at the end of one season of our academic and co-curricular and these aspects of our lives, and we're looking had another one ahead of us.

And the questions that I want to ask for us all this morning— these are questions I'm asking myself— what direction are we journeying? Let me ask more specifically, how are we responding to God?

From these stories, the reason why I paused and pointed out that the disposition or the posture that God has towards all of these humans and these examples is because it's not a question of his presence or his desire to have us in his presence or his lack of meeting us on the road. He's doing all those things. The posture is towards us. It's what is our response to that? And so I go through this survey of biblical stories because I'm wondering Do any of these resonate with you and your story and your life specifically?

Do any of these challenge you to change your posture towards God?

Please know this: because of what Jesus— I know I'm preaching to the choir, but I'm going to do it anyway— because of what Jesus did on the cross, the path is open. You are not hiding in the garden with no way back, or No path forward. You don't have to send someone else up the mountain. You don't have to run the complete opposite way towards Tarshish. You don't have to walk away from Jerusalem dejected, thinking that all this was just idle tales.

Every day, the invitation for you and I is the same. The God who is our rock and is unchanging postures himself towards us the very same way. Where are you? Draw near to me and I will draw near to you. Knock and the door will be open.

Seek and you will find. So seek him. Seek the people he's placed around you. The advantage we have in community life together is that those should be people who are also reflecting you upwards towards life in Christ together. Pursue local church.

Participation, pursue communion, pursue life together. Don't outsource that to someone else that you perceive maybe has it more figured out or who can be a conduit between you and God.

That doesn't say enough about the work of Christ. In fact, it insults the work that Christ did on your behalf and on mine. Pull up a chair, close the door, pray, break bread together. This is part of that upward spiraling towards life in Christ, that seeking, that daily, ordinary, sometimes inconvenient act of moving toward God and towards others. I'll pause for a moment.

If being pulled towards others— this isn't just an introversion or extroversion thing. If you're like, I don't know, I feel like people are against me, enemy. Let me point out this truth for you. In the Bible it says that our enemy is not flesh and blood.

So if that person or those people that you're thinking on have those things, they're not your enemy, they're your neighbor. You just haven't figured out exactly how to make it work with them yet. But the daily, ordinary, sometimes inconvenient of moving towards God. Let's choose that. And so I come back again to this idea of what got me here in the first place.

Each of those folks in my life, right, who passed on this past late winter and early spring in my family, in my community, the ones whose lives I've been reflecting on the last few months, you know something that they shared in common? Whether it was a close relative on my mom's side of the family, whether it was a close colleague and mentor that I held at a previous place of employment, whether it was an old baseball coach, whether it was a, a dad of a childhood friend who opened up their home to me many times as a kid, regardless of each and every single one of those, they shared

something in common. They were all moving toward something, and in this case, they were moving toward God, toward others, and toward loving God well and toward loving others well. That's the life that's worth living, and that's the journey that I want us being on together. And that's what I want when we say community life.

That's what I want for each of us, and I think it's what the Lord wants for us as well. So let me leave you with questions this morning, and some of these will be reiterating questions I've already asked, but I'll leave you with some questions to think on, and then we'll pray, and then we'll be done.

Like Adam and Eve, where are we hiding, and where is God wanting us to return to the right way with him?

Where are we allowing shame and guilt to inform our view of who God is?

Like the Israelites, where are we outsourcing and sending somebody else up the mountain in our place? When will we accept the invite to come up the mountain and spend time with God personally, intimately, in his presence? When will we accept the invite? Like Jonah, where are we in our own way?

Where do we think that our plans are better than God's plans? Where are our judgments and prejudices of others preventing us from seeing others as neighbors instead of as enemies?

And like those on the road to Emmaus, where is God meeting you on the way today? Are you taking time to seek him, to pursue him, and invite him in, and to recognize that he's right there walking alongside us? We just need to pursue presence with him. Let's pray.

God, I pray that these questions would ring in our ears and in our minds and in our hearts as we go from this place. I pray that we would evaluate them and think about our response to you.

Lord, I pray that our response would not just be a simple yes. Lord, we put at your feet the fact that we are not just a simple people. Our lives are complicated. There are things that are messed up and challenges and sin and obstructions that are keeping us, in our minds, from you. Lord, I pray that you would raise up in this community, in the church communities around us.

I pray that through your word and through your people, you would help us to work at the complexity of our lives, that we might respond to you rightly.

I pray that you would give by your Holy Spirit clarity in our lives to know what conversations to strike up. Give us the boldness to ask for help. Give us the humility to do the same thing. And Lord, I pray that we would also see it as our responsibility to be this for one another, those that are on this journey of spiraling upwards towards life in you. I pray that we would seek communion with you personally.

I pray that we would seek community together and that that community would be reflecting your Son all the time. And Lord, I pray against the work of the enemy. I bind the work of the enemy in those ways where those lies are being spoken to try and get us to be isolated and moving us in the opposite direction. Lord, I pray against that. I pray against that happening in an emotional sense, a social sense, a physical sense, a spiritual sense.

Lord, I pray against those things, and I pray that just your will would be loosed on our lives together. And as we pursue relationship with you, we pray these things in your name. Amen.