



# LOVE PEOPLE RELATIONALLY ENGAGED

## Spiritual Outcome Defined:

Participates in and promotes authentic, Christ-centered, unified community.

## Spiritual Outcome Described:

In the final days of Jesus' life, he offered a prayer. It is recorded in John 17, and it offers a critical insight into what Jesus deemed important. He knew he was in his final hours, and he knew he would shortly be removed from his closest followers. It's in these moments that Scripture tells us *"he looked toward heaven and prayed..."* (John 17:1). First he prayed for himself: *"Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you"* (John 17:1). He followed that with a prayer for his closest followers, the disciples who were in earshot at that very moment. He then, though, did something fascinating. He prayed *"for those who will believe in me through their message"* (John 17:20).

*"The soul that is alone. . .is like the burning coal that is alone. It will grow colder rather than hotter"*  
-- St. John of the Cross

In other words, he prayed for us, those who believe in him through the message of his earliest followers. Hear carefully what he asked: *"I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me."* (John 17:20-21). His prayer was for the unity, the oneness, of his followers. Jesus was not naïve to the challenges his followers would face and how our unity would be challenged time and time again.

But this did not prevent him from asking for it, and for giving us the implicit exhortation that those who follow Christ are to be called together into a unified community. Jesus did not envision a collection of strangers who happen to believe the same doctrines. Jesus envisioned a unified family when he said, *"Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother"* (Mark 3:35).

The authentic follower of Christ is one who treasures God's family, seeks to know and be known in that family, and works toward the unity of that family. This takes energy and effort as all relationships do. There is little to no gain for the person who claims to follow Christ, sits anonymously in a church service periodically, and then retreats to his or her "real" friends. The authentic follower of Christ knows there is power and importance in unity and invests the relational time and energy to be connected and unified with fellow followers of Christ.

### **Evidence of this Spiritual Outcome in a Person's Life:**

- Can identify and name a close circle of friends who are collectively seeking and serving Christ together
- Is committed to a local church and is relationally engaged in and through that church
- Consistently moves past ethnic barriers, socio-economic barriers, and personal affinity preferences to maintain, promote, and engage unity in the body of Christ
- Enjoys and engages unity with fellow Christ-followers in the church at large despite peripheral doctrinal differences

### **Guidance**

Read each passage multiple times. Then write your observations about the passage and any thoughts you have from the discernment question. What do you notice in the passage, and what does this reveal about your life?

### **Psalms 133**

Observations:

Discernment Question: On a scale of 1 to 5, how much do you value relational connectedness (1 being 'not at all' and 5 being 'very much')? Do you treasure relational connectedness as the writer of this Psalm clearly treasures it? Why or why not?



### **Proverbs 1:10-19, 13:20**

Observations:

Discernment Question: Describe the influence those closest to you have on you. Are they bringing out your best or your worst? Are they inspiring you to seek God or seek other things?

### **Mark 3:31-35**

Observations:

Discernment Question: How well connected are you to other followers of Christ? Is your connection best described as 'distant and periodic' or 'close like family'? What inspires or inhibits you in your connection to other followers of Christ?



## **John 17:20-23**

Observations:

Discernment Question: How unified are you with other followers of Christ? What has brought greater unity in your relationships? What has made unity difficult?

## **Acts 2:42-47**

Observations:

Discernment Question: How generous are you with your time, energy, and resources with other followers of Christ? How focused is your effort to truly know others and let them know you?



## **Hebrews 10:23-25**

Observations:

Discernment Question: Who is encouraging you in your faithfulness to Christ? Who are you encouraging in their faithfulness to Christ? List names.

## **1 John 1:5-7**

Observations:

Discernment Question: What disobedience might be present in your current season of life that is inhibiting your relational engagement of God and others?



## Revelation 7:9-12

Observations:

Discernment Question: What is your perspective on relationally connecting with other authentic followers of Christ who differ from you ethnically, culturally, or socioeconomically? Where do you enjoy this? Where are you stretched by it? What are you doing in your life to promote it?



## Next Steps

What are practical next steps you will do from what you have discovered in this survey of Scripture on staying relationally engaged? Include insights offered from others in your Life Group that could be applied in your own life as well.



## Memory Verses:

### Romans 12: 9-12 NIV

Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.

### Romans 12: 13-16 NIV

Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.

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