



LOVE PEOPLE RELATIONALLY ENGAGED

SPIRITUAL OUTCOME DEFINED

Participates in and promotes Christ-centered, unified community.

"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

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, and then "*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).

Jesus' prayer was for the unity, the oneness, of His followers. Of all the things Jesus could have prayed for His followers, why this? Why unity? Because apart from this characteristic, the world will not come to know Him. If His followers are not in loving community with one another, they cannot be in loving community with God. And, if they are not in loving community with God, how will the world see God and come to believe in the risen Lord Jesus? The unification of God's people is essential for the gospel, the good news of Jesus, to be displayed in all creation.

Jesus also prayed for unity because He knew it would be the most difficult thing to do. What are the odds of people from all different socio-economic backgrounds, cultures, sin struggles and personalities joining together in loving, self-giving relationship with one another? Apart from faith in Christ, how on earth would that be possible? How on earth could those relationships last? And yet, this is exactly what Christ calls us to. This is why unity is so powerful, because through love, we can overcome those odds and be the lights of the world we're called to be (Matthew 5:14). Jesus said, "By this everyone will know you are my disciples, if you love one another" (John 13:35).

Jesus also knew that we could never follow Him in isolation. We need one another and we belong to one another (Romans 12:5). We will not grow in our faith alone. As Eugene Peterson said, "There can be no maturity in the spiritual life, no obedience in following Jesus, no wholeness in the Christian life, apart from the immersion in, and embrace of, community. I am not myself by myself."

When we enter into a relationship with Christ, we are automatically adopted into a new family. There is no such thing as, "It's just me and God." There is not an option of having Jesus, but not accepting His family. He said, "*Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother*" (Mark 3:35). The 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. The Christian 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 in unity in the body of Christ.
- Enjoys and promotes unity with fellow Christ-followers in the Church at large, despite peripheral doctrinal differences and disagreements.

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?

PSALM 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?

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?

ROMANS 12:9-16

Observations:

Discernment Question: In what areas of community are you thriving? In what areas are you lacking? How might you grow in these areas?

HEBREWS 10:23-25

Observations:

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

REVELATION 7:9-12

Observations:

Discernment Question: What is your perspective on connecting with other 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 based on what you have discovered in this survey of Scripture about what it means to be relationally engaged? Include insights offered from others in your Life Group that could be applied in your own life, as well.

MEMORIZE SCRIPTURE

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.



LOVE PEOPLE RELATIONALLY ENGAGED

THE OBVIOUS

To love people, we must be in relationship with people.

This is self-evident. We don't need to belabor the point, but understanding this and doing this are two different things. Truth be told, with very little effort, we can skirt through our days and skip true relational contact with people, although it won't seem like it because people are everywhere.

We see them on the road.

We walk past them in stores.

We meet with them at work.

We watch them on TV.

We exchange thoughts with them on the Internet. We sit beside them in church.

We wave to them in the neighborhood. We pass them on the running trail.

We sit around them in restaurants.

They're everywhere, which seems good. We don't want to isolate ourselves and be alone. We don't want to live apart from people; but despite this, We are lonely.

Others may or may not perceive us as lonely. We ourselves, may or may not think about it consistently. But when we reflect, when we size up our relational worlds, in many of life's seasons we are far more isolated than we'd prefer. Maybe we lead an organization. We're surrounded by people vying for our time. Leadership, despite the abundance of relationships, can be very lonely.

Maybe we care for small children. We're surrounded by kids and activities. Parenthood, despite the relational demands, can be very lonely.

Maybe we have a group of friends we've known for years. We're surrounded by people who think they know us. Groups of people, despite all appearances, can be very lonely.

We don't set out to be lonely. We don't pull away and put up walls. We don't neglect the actions and activities that would build a healthy, relational world.

Or do we?

Yes, we want to relate.

No, we don't want to relate. Yes, we want to be known.

No, we don't want to be known. Yes, we want to be involved.

No, we don't want to be involved.

We are a fickle people who want and crave relational wholeness but do the oddest things that sabotage our own desires

ESCAPISM

Let's do a quick assessment — nothing scientific, but a gut-level response to a very significant question. Ask yourself...

When released from life's obligations, do I live life; or do I watch others live life?

Let's unpack the question.

Life has its obligations. We work; we take care of our homes; we do the tasks and run the errands. When those things are done, what do we do? Do we engage others and engage life? Or do we live vicariously through the adventures and thrills readily available through multimedia? We live in a strange era of human history. While sitting on a couch doing nothing, we can experience adventure, thrill, suspense, and challenge. None of it will be our own adventure, thrill, suspense, and challenge. All of it will be the observing of other's lives.

Our need for competition can be satisfied by cheering a team to victory.

Our need for adventure can be satisfied by reading about other people's risks.

Our need for purpose can be satisfied by watching others engage a mission.

It's an artificial world that can whittle away at our lives by piggybacking off of other people's dreams and adventures, while never truly living a life of our own.

To be sure, some of us hear this and feel self-justified. We don't escape. We don't avoid. We don't really watch TV, and we don't get lost on the Internet. This may, in fact, be true, but let's be forthright. What else might we use to escape true friendships? Do we escape to work? Do we escape to tasks at home? Do we escape to the running trail, the golf course, or the gym?

Yes, many of these have healthy expressions in our lives; and we do have legitimate need for solitude, but there's a difference between healthy solitude and relational isolation. If we're to love people, we must be in relationship with people, which leads to what may be the oddest form of escapism of all.

At times, we escape *from* people *with* people.

Yes, as odd as it may sound, one of the more well-worn escape routes from truly relating to people is the self-justification that comes from the relationships we do have. For some, we escape to a multitude of relationships. We fill our schedules with meetings, appointments, and events, but never truly slow down to talk to anyone. We know plenty of people, but nobody is truly known, including ourselves.

On the other end of the spectrum are those of us who escape broader relational circles by pointing to our one or two trusted confidants. We love these friends and they love us, which is good, but something is missing. Our lives lack the significance of being part of something bigger than ourselves. We have great conversations with a select few, but we don't have the rich community that happens when a diverse group of people unite in purpose.

This leads to a final tension.

TENSION

In our relational world, we need both breadth and depth.

If we have relational breadth without relational depth, we will have superficial friendships.

If we have relational depth without relational breadth, we will experience isolation.

This tension is seen most clearly in the extremes.

If all we have is breadth by being relationally connected to a great many people, there will be high fives and pats on the back, but there won't be the depth of friendship needed for relational health and personal transformation. A healthy relational context includes a few trusted confidants who know us well. But on the other side, if we lean so far into a few close friends at the expense of broader connection, we will isolate ourselves. We will not benefit from the greater community of fellow Christ-followers. Not only will this limit the impact our lives will have in this world, but it will miss the richness of diversity that comes from a broader cross-section of people.

To get the full weight of this, let's see what Scripture says about both relational depth and relational breadth.

RELATIONAL DEPTH IN SCRIPTURE

The critical role of a few soul mates is illustrated by an incident in the life of Moses.

The Israelites are going into battle. They will fight the Amalekites who *"came and attacked the Israelites at Rephidim"* (Exodus 17:8). Moses instructed Joshua...

"Choose some of our men and go out to fight the Amalekites. Tomorrow I will stand on top of the hill with the staff of God in my hands" (Exodus 17:9).

The following day, Joshua and crew went into battle, and Moses did as he said he would. He stood on top of a hill with the staff of God raised high in the air. In doing so, he quickly noticed something odd.

As long as Moses held up his hands, the Israelites were winning, but whenever he lowered his hands, the Amalekites were winning (Exodus 17:11).

So, when Moses raised the staff in the air, the Israelites would drive the Amalekites back, but when he lowered the staff, the Amalekites would drive the Israelites back.

It seemed God was making a point. For the Israelites to win, for them to thrive, they would need to entrust it all to God. Yes, they could swing their swords, but their swords would lack effectiveness if they trusted in their own strength rather than the strength of God.

This would have all been good if it weren't for the reality of fatigue. Scripture tells us that Moses' arms grew tired. He couldn't hold the staff in the air any longer. We might look at this and think, *"Surely God would understand. The point has been made, and they get it. Couldn't Moses now simply submit the whole event to God in his heart and forgo the arm-raising bit?"* Evidently, God had a second critical lesson to illustrate.

Scripture tells us that in order to keep the staff raised...

Aaron and Hur held his hands up — one on one side, one on the other — so that his hands remained steady till sunset (Exodus 17:12).

Moses wanted to submit it all to God. He wanted to persevere in his faith; but despite his best efforts, he could not do it alone. He needed two people — Aaron and Hur — to stand on either side of him. Together, the three of them hoisted the staff in the air and maintained their submission to God. In time, the battle was won and they were all, once again, awed by God's power.

That image — Moses with Aaron and Hur standing by his side — is illustrative of a theme we see throughout Scripture and a need we see in our own lives. To live by faith is a battle; and in this battle, God has not designed us to stand alone. The world will come against us. We need trusted confidants to bolster our strength and stay engaged. At times, these confidants will “hold our hands in the air” by listening to our doubts, fears, or concerns. At other times, they will “hold our hands in the air” by speaking truth into our lives or supporting us when we struggle.

God has not designed us to be independent from each other, but interdependent as we bolster and strengthen each other’s resolve to stay fully entrusted to God. To genuinely stand with each other means we must have depth of friendship. We cannot and need not have this type of friendship with all, but we must have a few trusted friends who know us and of whom we know.

We are able to tell them what’s going on in our lives and put all pretense aside. If we are going to persevere in life’s battles, if we are going to entrust it all to God, we will often need our own Aaron and Hur to stand beside us, to keep our arms up and our faith strong.

DAVID AND JONATHAN

Scripture offers several examples of these Aaron-and Hur-like moments. One of the more profound is the friendship of David and Jonathan. Saul, Jonathan’s father and king of Israel, sought to kill David. David had to flee for his life. On the run, his faith would be stretched to the limits. How would David maintain his strength in God? How would he “keep his arms in the air?”

Hear carefully how Scripture describes the actions of David’s trusted confidant, Jonathan.

And Saul’s son Jonathan went to David at Horesh and helped him find strength in God. “Don’t be afraid,” he said. “My father Saul will not lay a hand on you. You will be king over Israel, and I will be second to you. Even my father Saul knows this” (1 Samuel 23:16-17).

What did Jonathan do? He helped David “find strength in God.” Or, put another way, he stood beside David and helped him lift the staff of God into the air. Left on his own, David could have swirled in his own self-doubt and confusion. He could have been lost to disillusionment and clenched his fist toward heaven. Instead, with the help of his trusted confidant, David was able to maintain his faith and courage.

Life has its battles. There are those seasons where we feel the hot pursuit of our own Saul. We genuinely want to maintain our faith, to raise that staff in the air. But, try as we may, our hands drop to our sides and we do not have the strength to raise them. It’s in times like these that we discover whether or not we have done the hard work of establishing our own soul mates. Had David neglected relational depth, he would not have had this friendship to lean on. He would have been both alone and lonely. Relational depth was an essential aspect of his journey.

This all sounds good, so why would we need more than that? Why would we need relational breadth as well as depth? Relational depth sounds rich and authentic. Do we really need to branch out?

RELATIONAL BREADTH

A stunning statement is made at the end of the story of Israel and the Amalekites. We previously read that “Aaron and Hur held [Moses’] hands up—one on one side, one on the other—so that his hands remained steady till sunset.” The very next line is almost shocking.

So Joshua overcame the Amalekite army with the sword (Exodus 17:13).

He did?! Shouldn’t the closing line read, “So Moses overcame the Amalekite army by his faith”? Here at the end of the story—a story which illustrates that true power is in God and not in the sword—credit is given to the sword? What’s that about? The statement is almost insulting. But what if it did read that way? What if the entire commentary was about Moses and his faith? What if the only people mentioned were Moses, Aaron, and Hur? This might seem

okay at first, but it wouldn't seem okay if you happened to be one of the soldiers who spent his day risking his life on the battlefield. Yes, Israel won the battle because they entrusted it to God, but this did not happen without an army of soldiers swinging their swords. Over and over, again and again, God works not with isolated individuals, but in and through individuals in the midst of a larger community.

Hear carefully this brief description in Scripture of Christ's larger community.

Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it (1 Corinthians 12:27).

Lift the hood on this verse and discover that the "you" in the line, "you are the body of Christ," is plural in the original language. Collectively, we represent Christ in the world and to each other. No individual can holistically do this. It's to the collection of all his followers that Christ has given a diversity of gifts. The imagery of his "body" is critical to our understanding.

THE BODY OF CHRIST

Hear carefully these words from 1 Corinthians:

If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? But in fact God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. If they were all one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, but one body. (1 Corinthians 12:17-20).

If we isolate ourselves from broader community, there are at least three damaging results: We suffer, the body suffers, and the impact of the body is diminished. Hear what Paul wrote to the church in Ephesus:

From [Christ] the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work. (Ephesians 4:16).

The body of Christ is an interdependent body. We all benefit from one another. If we lack relational breadth, we will limit the influence the body of Christ has on our own lives. There will be a time when we need encouragement, but we won't have relationship with a gifted encourager. Or there will be a time when we need wise counsel, but we won't have relationship with a person who has depth of insight.

Likewise, the body suffers because we, too, have a unique contribution to make. If you're a gifted intercessor, your prayers are limited by disassociation from a broader relational world. This is damaging. The body of Christ needs your prayers. If you're a gifted teacher, your insights will be limited by your context. You won't have the teaching opportunities the body of Christ needs you for. If you're a gifted leader, and you pull back, something is going unled, which is crippling in a multitude of ways. If there is anything we know about the human body, even the seemingly most insignificant parts are painfully missed when absent.

Then there is our collective impact. God did not want to accomplish what he did through Israel by having Moses pray alone on top of a lonely hill. Likewise, God did not want to accomplish what he did through the efforts of one brash soldier. It was through the collective and unified influence of all of them, entrusted to the power of God, that they were able to accomplish something far greater than any individual could ever have done alone. The story is no different today. God is not looking for any other individual, other than Christ, to bring what must be brought to this world. Christ is doing this through us, collectively working together.

This all makes sense. We get it. We get the need for depth, and we get the need for breadth. So why is it that both are so often challenged? Why do we often avoid depth of friendship? Or on the other extreme, why do we avoid connectedness to a breadth of relationships?

CHALLENGES TO DEPTH

Let's consider relational depth. Why is this challenged? What gets in the way of depth of friendship? There is no one answer to this question. For some of us, we just get busy. We get caught up in life's activities and swept away by life's demands. For others, we've had depth of friendship; it was good, but it also took a lot of energy. We'd like those kinds of friendships, but we also know it takes effort. For others, we've just not really thought about it, but we suspect there's something to it and are cautiously considering what to do about it.

But there's another category that demands closer attention. There is the issue of pain.

Relationships require vulnerability. Maybe we've made ourselves vulnerable before and we got wounded. Maybe it was a friend or spouse who violated our trust. We made ourselves vulnerable to that person and we were hurt beyond description. Or maybe there was another kind of hurt. Maybe we entrusted ourselves to a person. That person was a good and faithful confidant, but for one reason or another, we lost the relationship. Relationships are lost for a variety of reasons. Maybe we opened our hearts to a person, lived in a good and healthy relationship with that person, and tragedy struck. The person passed away. Maybe the challenge was much more practical. The friendship changed because circumstances changed. The person got a new job and had to move across the country. Maybe we entrusted ourselves to a work colleague, and the relationship got complicated due to dynamics at the office. The reasons vary, and some are more challenging than others, but the results are similar. Past wounds can dictate our willingness to make ourselves vulnerable again.

When a relationship ends painfully, we may understandably be hesitant to invest the time and energy to go there again.

How do we address this? What do we do about the reality of pain in vulnerable relationships? Do we self-protect and hide ourselves? Do we throw caution to the wind and jump in to any and every relationship? Questions abound, but one insight is critical.

Consider carefully the following two statements.

Wounds, when addressed in a healthy manner, increase our ability to relate to others in deep and meaningful ways.

And wounds, when not addressed in a healthy manner, decrease our ability to authentically relate to others in deep and meaningful ways.

Or put another way, our wounds may be our greatest gift we bring to the other. Conversely, our wounds may be the greatest hardship we bring to the other. Relationships with the wounded, but healed, offer a depth of friendship otherwise unavailable. This is not the case when a wound festers and develops gangrene. Unaddressed and infected wounds will limit our relational capacity significantly. We know both sides of this from our relationships with others.

There's something deep and profound about relating to a person weathered by hardship. We want to know and be known by that person, but we also have reservations about relating to a person who's operating from active and unhealed wounds. We want to love this person, but we sense their neediness and instinctively step back.

With this in mind, hear carefully Scripture's description of God's heart and actions toward wounds.

He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds (Psalm 147:3).

If we hide our wounds — if we keep them to ourselves — our wounds will fester and grow from bad to worse. But if we deal with them honestly — if we bring them before God and others — God will bring about a depth of healing that will only increase our ability to love others. We will bring a depth and humility to our relationships unavailable prior to our wounds. To accomplish this, though, we must be willing to do the very thing we fear.

We must open ourselves to depth of relationship.

The very thing we fear doing because of our wounds is the very thing that will be instrumental in our healing. Of course, it is unwise to open our wounds to any and every person. We find the trusted confidants with whom we can process our pain. There's a fascinating parallel between physical and relational wounds. Physical wounds are healed when they are cleansed, brought into the open, and given time to heal. When they are not cleansed, and when they are not brought into the open, the physical wound festers and becomes infected.

Likewise, when we cleanse a wound — when we purify it from the effects of bitterness, unforgiveness, cynicism, and distrust — in time, that wound will heal. We may never forget that wound, scar, or limp, but there will be a relational wholeness and health that far surpasses the memory.

CHALLENGES TO RELATIONAL BREADTH

Challenges to relational breadth are also multifaceted. There is no one reason why we would avoid breadth of relationships. For some, they simply don't like it. They don't like the energy it takes to engage groups of people. Others are put off by the inevitable challenging personalities in any group. They quietly sneak out the "back door" in hopes of avoiding those who irritate them for one reason or another. Others struggle with disillusionment. Their expectations were not met. They engaged a group of people, and they expected more, but experienced less. There are many reasons for avoiding relational breadth, but through them all is a common missing factor.

We often lack vision for it and consequently fail to persevere.

We see superficial friendships and quickly check out because we do not see the tremendous importance of a group of people banded together for the good of each other and the good of our cause. Or, we get dinged by an offhanded comment and decide participation isn't worth the work. Or maybe we thought it would feel different. We expected a group of people who really felt like family, and it kind of does. But more often, it simply feels like a group of people who happen to know each other. So, we go in search of something else.

The inevitable reality, though, is that the next group suffers from its own set of challenges. We participate in a particular ministry, group, or church ... experience a degree of frustration ... and so we search out another. The other feels great at first. They've got it all figured out and are doing what we wished would be done. In time, though, we discover the new group has its own set of weaknesses and shortcomings. At first, these weaknesses and shortcomings don't bother us, but in time they do. So we show ourselves the door, and repeat the experience. In time, we cycle from one group to another, from one ministry to another, from one church to another. All of them had their strengths, but all of them left us disappointed. Why can't anyone meet our expectations?

Scripture tells us to ...

...not become weary in doing good... especially to those who belong to the family of believers
(Galatians 6:9-10).

We're to engage, to do good, to serve those who serve Christ. What's most interesting about this statement in Scripture, though, is what comes between the two statements.

Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers (Galatians 6:9-10).

What is it going to take to "reap a harvest" among the "family of believers?" This harvest demands that "we do not give up." To experience what we hunger to experience, to be part of a movement— a group of people serving each other and those around them — takes perseverance. We must persevere through the inevitable realities of relationships. We must persevere through unmet expectations. We must persevere through imperfections and disappointments. If we fail to persevere, we will only experience the same experience negatively recycled again and again; but if we dig in — if we truly engage — in time, we will experience a group of people with whom we are truly doing life, being a family, and making a difference. Spiritual gifts will be more broadly represented. Opportunities for

service will be more obvious. Stories will accumulate of changed lives and service offered. This kind of community is not obtained instantly. It takes years, a depth of commitment, and a group of people who will walk through life's ups and downs together. When this is done, and as we “do good to all people,” we will, in time, “reap a harvest if we do not give up.”

ALL THE MORE

Scripture calls us to “hold unswervingly to the hope we profess” (Hebrews 10:23). This is not easy. For this very reason, this passage exhorts relational connectedness:

And 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).

As challenges increase, as our own needs increase, as opportunities to make a difference increase, we must connect with each other “all the more.” We must “spur one another on,” or put another way, we must love people. We must love each other. We must do the hard work of relating to each other so we can reap the rich harvest that comes from our friendships.

To neglect this puts us at risk. We risk *swerving in the hope we profess*, and we risk diminished impact through the body of Christ to whom we are connected. To protect from this diminished experience, we must not only dig deeply into Scripture, we must dig deeply into ourselves. We need depth of insight into our own inclinations. Do we neglect or experience depth of relationships? Do we neglect or experience breadth of relationships? If so, why? What drives us toward or away from people? The **apply** experience for this spiritual outcome is designed to help us gain depth of insight and answers to these questions.



LOVE PEOPLE RELATIONALLY ENGAGED

We will begin this exercise by assessing:

Do I have relational breadth?

Do I have relational depth?

This will be helpful and important, but not particularly surprising. Where this exercise gets more interesting is in the follow-up question:

Why?

We all have a bent. We bend toward breadth, we bend toward depth, or maybe we bend away from relationships altogether. But why? What drives us? Many things keep us from good and healthy relationships.

I'm busy.

Fair enough. Life can be full, but...

Why are you busy?

Are you busy because you just happen to be in a busy season of life? Or are you busy because you can't stop ... you can't let go ... you can't keep from controlling?

I'm reserved. I don't open up to people.

Fair enough. We all have different personalities. Some are more open than others, but...

Why are you more reserved?

Are you more reserved because you are a more reserved person? Or are you being protective? Are you guarding a wound? Do you not want to open up — again — and make yourself vulnerable?

I've done that before. I've been involved.

Fair enough. Life has its seasons, and there are times we're less engaged than others, but...

Have you pulled back from community because God has led you there, or are you neglecting the call to perseverance? What's holding you back? What's keeping you from engaging the body of Christ?

The pages that follow will lead you to assess and then discern what motivates or inhibits your relational connectedness.

FIRST STAGE: ASSESS RELATIONAL DEPTH AND BREADTH

Relational Depth

With which people have you had relational depth? Who were or are your soul mates? Who knows you, and you know them?

Past people with whom I've had relational depth:

-
-
-
-
-

Present people with whom I have relational depth:

-
-
-
-
-

Questions to Assess

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
I can name purposeful communities I have engaged from most seasons of my life.	1	2	3	4	5
I have broad relational support from many people when I face hardships in my life.	1	2	3	4	5
I seek out and enjoy being part of groups that are doing something purposeful and intentional.	1	2	3	4	5
I persevere in organizations (formal or informal), even when they're challenging.	1	2	3	4	5
I consistently make meaningful contributions to the groups (formal or informal) with whom I participate.	1	2	3	4	5

SECOND STAGE: WHY?

From the previous pages, which relationships were easiest to identify? Which were hardest to identify? Write easiest and hardest by the following. Rank them 1 to 4 (1 being easiest, 4 being hardest).

____ Past depth

____ Present depth

____ Past breadth

____ Present breadth

Reflect on how you ordered these. Why was one category harder than the other? If it was harder to identify deep relationships in your present, for example, is there an identifiable reason? If past breadth relationships came easier, what was it about yourself or your circumstances in your past that made it easy? Why is it different today? Even more, consider how your past may be influencing your present.

Add the numbers you circled at the bottom of the breadth and depth pages. Total them here:

____ Depth

____ Breadth

Reflect on which is higher and which is lower. If there is a significant difference between the two, why is that? Why are you more active in one over the other? What holds you back in one or the other? Consider this thoughtfully and prayerfully.