

Synopsis of **The Search to Belong** by Joseph Meyers Zondervan 2003.

As I walked into GNC, I was looking for something specific. I was out of town so this was not my normal store. I was greeted by a jolly “How’s it goin’?”

“Doing well,” I replied.

Not missing a beat, I went on with my search. I did make eye contact and I didn’t want to. However, in the back of my mind I knew the greeting was entirely too jolly for the salesman to let our conversation end.

He let me search for a few seconds. Then, interrupting the silence he asked, “Can I help you find something?”

My knee-jerk reaction is always a quick, “No thank you, I’m just looking.” There, I had done it. I had brushed him off like a fly on a cow’s back.

It wasn’t the truth. I wasn’t just browsing to see what was available. I was looking for something specific.

A few more seconds went by as I diligently went into “hunter-gather” mode. I rapidly scanned the shelves looking for the familiar container size, color, and design. Thank God for franchising. You can count on the franchise, from city to city, to shelve product in approximately the same place. I went to my right, stopping mid-store. There it is. “Grab it and go,” I said to myself.

Just as I reached for the item I noticed a similar formula to its left.

“I have a couple of customers that swear by that product,” he said as he moved closer.

I didn’t respond. I didn’t want his input. I knew what I wanted. “Get it and get out,” I shouted to myself.

A few steps away he started spouting a laundry list of nutritional information. He said, “I needed to *this* or *that*. I should supplement *this* with *that*.” The information formed a mountain around me.

“I’ll just get this,” I said moving toward the check out counter.

“Great, have you tried...?”

I reminded him, “No, I think this will be all.”

He continued to engage me as he rang up my two items.

“Do you have one of our Gold Member cards?”

“No, and I don’t think I want one tonight, thanks” I promptly informed him.

“You’re not from here, are you?”

“No, I’m from Cincinnati.”

“What brings you to these parts?” he inquired.

“I am writing a book, and I thought...”

He enthusiastically interrupted, “You’re writing a book? What’s it about?”

This question along with his enthusiasm slowed my exit strategies.

“It is about how we communicate space to help people connect, belong and develop community.”

With a very inquisitive look he responded, “Hey, that’s cool. Tell me more. What do you mean “communicate space.””

“People want to connect,” I proceeded to share with him. “All of us have a need to belong. Belonging happens in four spaces: Public, Social, Personal and Intimate. When we recognize that people have different spaces they want to connect with us in we can match our communication tools to the context and help them feel safe and comfortable. When we speak a spatially foreign vocabulary they have a sense of unease and anxiety.”

“Wow, that’s real cool. But, how does all this relate to someone like me,” he wisely asked.

“Well, you asked me if I wanted a membership card, right? Do you know why I didn’t want the card to get the discount?”

“No, but there are several people who say, “No” and they come in here all the time. They could really save a lot of cash. It’s a good deal,” he rambled.

“I didn’t want the card because I didn’t want to be that close to you. I didn’t want you to send me mail. I didn’t want you to have all my personal information in your data base. It is simply too close,” I informed him.

“I can see that. You really fought me as I was trying to help you. I was getting too close, wasn’t I?”

“Yes. You see people come here to buy personal items and sometimes intimate items. People come to find help with their weight. Others come because of an illness or the fear of illness.”

“And some come for help with their sex life,” he interrupted again.

“That’s right. You are not a grocery store or a department store. You sell personal and intimate product, much like Victoria Secret. People are cold to you when you invade personal and intimate space with a public or social sales model.”

“So, how do I develop a sales model that helps them feel comfortable,” he asked.

“I’m not sure but, I think that most people like to open their own doors to let people walk into personal and intimate space. Maybe the model looks like a gentle knock to let people know you are here if they need you and then step back and let them open the door.”

“Yes, that’s it. Like with you, I invaded your space, which was not good, however, I finally knocked in a way that you opened up. It’s all about giving people the space to decide how they want to belong to this store and product. Wow, that’s cool, a selling space,” he replied.

As we help people with their lives, we could allow them to live in the spaces they choose. We could encourage them to belong in the space that is comfortable for them at the time. We could treat them as a significant part of the “family.” We could stop forcing people into a space that is closer than they want to be. Forced belonging is called assault. “Family” is an open and free space, not closed and controlled.

Be at peace, even if you are selling the most intimate product, others will find it in their own space. Gently knock and wait for them to invite you to the space they choose

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### **Give Me Some Space!**

*What is distance? I know that nothing which truly concerns man is calculable, weighable, measurable. True distance is not the concern of the eye; it is granted only to the spirit. Its value is the value of language, for it is language which binds things together. — Antoine de St.-Exupery, Flight to Arras*

I searched strategically for the line that would move us through quickly. Calculating all of the attributes of a good line—fewest persons in line + fewest items in the carts ahead of you + alert and swift cashier + no blinking light above register—my wife and I made our selection.

Standing side-by-side, cart directly in front of us, I peeked over the POP counters to see if anyone noticed the wise choice we had made. I also wanted to see if indeed it was a wise choice or if an early line withdrawal was needed.

The final decision was made. We were staying put. Proudly we looked at each other. She rubbed my hand as to say “well done.” Then I felt something on my other side. It wasn’t a touch. It was the same kind of feeling you get when you know someone is watching you.

I looked quickly to my right. There, standing directly beside me, was a gentleman I had never met. He was standing there quietly waiting for his turn to check out.

But why was he next to me? Didn’t he know the rules? Since the first grade we have all learned the rules of standing in line. Had he skipped the first grade? Had he skipped all the grades? I looked at him with a polite, questioning look. I tried to give him a clue. It was not working.

I thought, “When standing in line you stand behind the person in front of you. That is the rule. And when standing behind, you do not follow too close. You must always keep about a person’s width difference between you.”

Why didn’t he know the rules? I became aggravated. Why wasn’t he taking my glaring hints? I wanted to leave this line and the store. I would gladly give up my strategic position and return another day. I began to sweat and fidget. The cashier could not possibly work fast enough to get us through the line. My rate of breathing increased. I felt close. I felt as though I was in a Seinfeld episode. I wanted him to move. He was an unwelcome visitor in my space. He did not belong there. I wanted him to move to his space.

## **Communicating Belonging**

Space/distance is the first and most convincing way we communicate belonging.

Have you ever tried to have a private conversation with someone standing on the other side of a large crowded room? How about a large empty room? We may start the conversation in this space however, we quickly move closer.

Conversely, have you experienced the “close talker?” Try to have a social conversation with someone who insists on “invading your space.” The first reaction is to move away. Or, you may be inclined to move the conversation closer. Either way you adjust the space.

We communicate belonging through space in two ways. The first is actual real estate-space. Second, are the words we say that have spatial connotations. The first is easy to see, as in the examples above. It is easy to spot because it is visual. We not only can feel the uncomfortable setting of using clashing, incongruent spaces. We can see it.

The second is more elusive.

Space is the development of perspective in our mind. Humans adjust the definition of space depending on surrounding variables. For example, intimate space could be defined as “close” space. However, what kind of space is an elevator? When we step onto an elevator we step into public space. The amount of real estate does not effect our definition of the space. It is the developed perspective in our mind that defines elevators as public space.

Because space is observed mentally, language has a great influence over our interpretation. It has been said that approximately 20 percent of the words in the English dictionary have spatial connotations. Unknowingly, we casually tell people how close or how far away we want them to be. We communicate position, trust, and vulnerability through our spatial language. The accumulation communicates belonging.

## **Common Myths of Belonging (Part I)**

Community is a complex creature. Many factors contribute to finding successful community. With the erosion of the geographically close family and the heightened mobility of our culture, many people struggle to learn healthy competencies for community.

Schools, service agencies, churches, and other organizations are making a concerted effort to help. Yet several common myths surround the search to belong, myths that dilute and confuse the definitions we employ to describe our journey to connect.

### **More time = more belonging**

The first myth is that the greater the amount of time spent in relationship with another person, the more authentic the community will be. This is a pervasive myth. In reality, time has little to do with a person's ability to experience significant belonging. Many people tell stories of first-time, episodic introductions from which a spontaneous connection emerges. Have you ever said, "I just met you, but it seems like I've known you all my life"?

Or, for still another perspective, Rose describes an experience at her church:

About a month ago a woman named Sandra began attending. She is 56 years old. She came to our group last night. She has zero church background. Four years ago she was alone on a week-long vacation to Mexico. One morning by the pool, she struck up a conversation with the young woman sitting next to her. She learned that this young woman was there on her honeymoon. When the bride's husband joined her by the pool, Sandra tried to excuse herself, but they just kept talking with her.

Sandra said that she ran into this couple off and on during the rest of her vacation. They mentioned they attended a Vineyard church in California. "It wasn't like they were trying to recruit me or anything," she was quick to add. "It just came up in one of our conversations that they were Christians and where they went to church."

Sandra was so impressed with how kind they were, and she liked how they treated each other. She went away from them thinking they had something—values or a lifestyle—she found attractive. She told me probably once a year for the past four years she has thought about going to church. She looked in the phone book for a Vineyard church (because she had no idea where else to go) and found us.

A short connection around a swimming pool had significance years later. Belonging is not controlled by time, and time by itself does not develop belonging.

### **More commitment = more belonging**

People often believe that there is a significant relationship between commitment and community. This is, however, a romantic view. When we search to belong, we aren't really looking for commitment—we simply want to connect.

A relationship that involves commitment does not necessarily promote a greater experience of belonging. A married couple may feel very committed to their relationship, yet still feel the strain of not belonging to each other. Every month I'm reminded of my commitment to my financial responsibilities, yet I never experience belonging because of those commitments.

To experience healthy community we need significant relationships. "Significant" is not the same as "close" or "committed." My wife, Sara, practices the ancient craft of rug hooking. "Hookers," as they call themselves, gather around the country in small guilds, in week-long schools, and for conferences. Every fall Sara attends a weekend conference in northern Ohio. This conference is very significant in Sara's life. She finds help with her craft. She connects with those who have the same passion. Mostly, she finds a respite from her busy life. Yet neither the relationship with the conference nor the relationships with the participants can be accurately called "committed."

Sara is by no means committed to the conference. Every year the discussion is repeated: "Should I spend the money and time or should I stay home?" Even though she has attended several years in a row, the conference cannot count on her commitment. What they can count on is her passion for the craft. And that she will make her decision to attend at the very last moment.

She has no committed relationship with any of the participants. She's just now beginning to remember their names from year to year. She rarely connects with them outside of the conference. She's never called any of them on the phone to chat. These relationships cannot be described as close or committed. Still, they are significant to Sara's experience of community.

**More purpose = more belonging**

During the 1980s Tom Peters led *The Search for Excellence* revolution within the business community. He, and others, prescribed mission, vision, and purpose statements to ailing and healthy organizations alike. Groups were started to help people with their search for community, and the first order of business was to write a statement of purpose. After all, people who strive together toward a common goal connect, right?

We even changed our language. We no longer asked people to attend committee meetings. They were now "team members" who attended "team meetings." And this simple change was all in the hope of helping people feel connected.

Although many positive accomplishments sprang from this newly focused approach, in reality this strategy has very little connection with the community experience. Sometimes people who have a common passion and purpose do connect. But a common purpose or vision or goal does not guarantee that people will connect.

**More personality = more belonging**

Many people believe that some have a natural ability to belong. They assume that if a person is more gregarious, more extroverted, he or she will have little trouble experiencing community, whereas those who are shy will struggle to belong.

This misconception is based on an outward perception of what is taking place. It has very little to do with what is actually experienced. I have interviewed several extroverts who outwardly seem to have little trouble connecting, yet who speak of a deep search for belonging. I have listened also to those who are shy tell me that their lives are rich and full with significant community.

Introversion and extroversion are learned forms of social behavior that help us navigate our day-to-day lives. They are categories for helping us understand and interpret our relational experiences. But introversion and extroversion neither block nor enhance our experience of belonging. Healthy community can be experienced and developed by introvert and extrovert alike.

**More proximity = more belonging**

Remembering a time when the culture was less mobile than it is today, people tend to believe the fifth myth: geographical proximity creates greater community. Says Randy Frazee, "The simple fact is that in all places of effective community people live in close proximity to each other."

This statement is both true and false. It is true that people who live in close geographical proximity may connect with one another. Yet space is in some sense a matter of perspective. The same real estate can convey a certain distance in one situation yet have an entirely different meaning in another.

Further, "close proximity" need not be geographical. Consider, for example, the significant connections that are made digitally. Online bulletin boards and chat rooms, instant messaging, and mobile phone text messaging do not require close proximity to establish significant connections among people.

**More small groups = more belonging**

I have often heard ministers say to their congregations, "We're glad you're here. But if you really want to know what it's like to be part of our congregation, participate in a small group."

The implication is that small groups are the best—if not the only—way to build authentic community. Almost every book I read on developing a successful church touts small groups as the key. But I have read that churches that provide small group opportunities can expect about a thirty percent involvement at best from the congregation. Even if thirty percent involvement is higher than it is in churches without small group programs, it is still not good.

Why only thirty percent? That's because small groups do not accomplish the promise of fulfilling all facets of a person's search for community. Small groups deliver only on one or two specific kinds of connection. A person's search for community is more complex than this. The truth is that people can experience belonging in groups ranging in size from 2 to 2,000 or more. People have the competencies to pursue many different paths in their search for community. Many congregations have gone down the small group road only to find they have circled a cul-de-sac and ended up where they began.

Probably, most of us have bought into one or more of these six myths, whether wittingly or unwittingly. And most of us have probably been left feeling like we've been cheated out of a promise. I know I have. And so I began to search for an authentic description of

“belonging” in order to enhance the “community conversation.” And I began to search for the place belonging plays in the conversation of my life.

## **Experiencing Belonging**

People experience belonging in four spaces: Public, Social, Personal, and Intimate. We communicate how we want people to belong to us by using the vocabulary of each space. These lexicons help people develop and experience community.

Public belonging is the space where we connect through outside an influence. Fans of a sports team connect because of the team they cheer for. They wear official garb, buy special broadcasted viewing privileges, stay up late at night, and rise early in the morning just to see the results of the game. These relationships carry great significance in our lives.

In fact, public belonging is a space where we need numerous significant relationships in order to experience a sense of healthy belonging and community. We need to develop *more* connections in this space than in any of the other three.

True community can be experienced in public space. Public space is not mere togetherness; it is connectedness. It is *family*. An essential key to developing community is the maturing of our competencies for growing significant, committed public belongings. Public belonging is evident when we worship together, pray together, greet each other, laugh together, and share announcements that apply to the whole group, not just to a select few. We invite people to gather as one.

Social belonging is the space where we connect through sharing “snap-shots” of what it would be like to be in personal space with us. The phrases “first impression” and “best foot forward” are referring to this spatial belonging. Your favorite bank teller, the pharmacist, and some of the people with whom you work, these are your significant social belongers. Social belonging is important for two reasons. First it provides the space for “neighbor” relationships. A neighbor is a relationship with someone you know well enough to ask for (or provide) small favors.

Secondly, they are important because they provide a safe “selection space” for those you would like to grow a “deeper” relationship with. In social space we provide the information that helps others decide whether or not they connect with us. We get just enough information to decide to keep this person in this space or move them to another space. Third, these interactions allow us to display a reality we create of who we are.

Personal belonging is the space where we connect through sharing private (not naked) experiences, feelings, and thoughts. We call the people we connect to in this space “close friends.” These are those that know more about us than an acquaintance and yet not so much that they would feel uncomfortable.

Intimate belonging is the space where we connect through sharing “naked” experiences, feelings, and thoughts. We have very few relationships that are intimate. These people know the “naked truth” about us and the two of us are not “ashamed.”

## **The Four Spaces**

In all four spaces:

- \$ We connect.
- \$ We are committed and participate.
- \$ We find the connection significant.

For harmony and for the sake of health, we need significant belonging in all four spaces: public, social, personal and intimate.

## **Connection in All Four Spaces**

When people share stories about how they connect with others in significant ways they reveal that:

- \$ they want help with their lives,
- \$ they have a deep longing to belong, and
- \$ they seek to connect in spontaneous and healthy ways.

## **Language and Belonging**

As we seek community, it is key to understand the linguistic subtleties we use to promote a sense of belonging. One way we experience community is through language. As people search for community, they are listening with their eyes, ears and emotions. They are keenly aware of how we tell them they belong or don't belong.

Only two categories – members and nonmembers. Membership required contracts, beliefs, commitments, and rituals. Now we struggle to build a community of believers in a culture that wants to experience belonging over believing.

“Bold fellowship” – it is not found in the demands of membership but in the scope of who is allowed to belong and to experience family and home. “Who,” not “What,” is the essence of “love thy neighbour.”

How we occupy physical space– whether through actual real estate (the shopper standing next to my wife and me in the supermarket line) or through more subtle “spatial language”– tells others whether we want them to belong.

We need to reconsider how we advertise the groups/spaces, how we talk about them. We give some too much: we don't give others enough. In fact, we downplay most of these groups. We just need to see how connections are created and how we communicate that.

## **Healthy Community**

All belonging has significance in our lives. Healthy community happens when we hold a harmonious connection between the four spaces. Harmony means we have more public belonging than social. We have more social than personal. And, we have very few intimate belongings.

A healthy strategy to grow community is to allow people to grow significant relationships in all four spaces. People belong in the space they want or need to belong. Insisting that real, authentic, or true community happens only when people get “close” is a synthetic reality. Furthermore, it grows unhealthy expectations of what community delivers. Community delivers roots, place, and belonging. This is accomplished through the significant relationships we embrace in all four spaces.

## **Family Space**

It is a hard, holiday conversation. Everyone is nice enough. Holiday cheer is shared. But it is over a mouth piece and travels through optic fibers. Why aren't we together? Why aren't you here? These are the real questions in the air.

Tom moved away to marry his bride. It was a wonderful wedding. But something strange happened. He not only moved away physically, he moved to a different social space in the family.

Tom's mother was not prepared for this move. She expected him to belong to the family as he always had, intimately. The saying is true, “marry a daughter gain a son, marry a son loose a son.”

As they talked the questions came as they always do. When are you coming over? How long can you stay? When will we talk again? The underlying themes, why are you so far away and why don't you want to be a part of the family any more?

Tom feels trapped. He earnestly wants to be with his family. However, he has two other families to consider now. His mother's words do not help. She makes him feel like a stranger.

Tom moved. He could not belong in intimate space any longer. He could only support the intimate relationships of his new family. He still wanted to belong to the family of his childhood. He just could not belong in the same way.

## **Searching for Community**

People seek to connect. They select the spatial connection that fulfills a need for them at that time. They are looking to us for a significant, spatially-specific experience of belonging. They may choose one space over another because they have enough significant relationships in the other spaces.

Sometimes we are so anxious for people to experience community like we experience it (or like we think it should be experienced), that we speak the language to move them to the space in which we want them to belong. By our words we make attempts to help them feel “real” belonging. We surmise, “If they only knew how special community is in *this space*.”

We promise that if they would do *this* or *that* they could really belong to the “family.” If they would attend *this* event at *this* time or, if they would commit to *this* group or give resources to *that* group or, if they would only belong like we think they should belong, we accept them as a “member.”

What we accomplish is an uncomfortable space. We produce an unwelcome closeness. We make them decide between belonging like *they* want to belong or to try to belong like *we* want them to belong. Either way they feel like a stranger. Mostly, they choose to move along to find community elsewhere.

We all search for community.

We want “families” to belong to.

We need significant, healthy relationships in all four spaces.

As we help people with their lives, we need to allow them to live in the space they choose.

### **Building Community**

What does it look like for an organization to except the idea that community is the gathering of healthy relationship in all four spaces? It may look like the political party community.

I am a Republican. I belong to The Grand Ole Party. I belong to them in a public space. The only outward indication that I am a part of the republican family is that I show up and vote.

I do not stuff envelopes or attend party events (social). I do not ask others to financially give their support (personal). I have never campaigned for office (intimate). I vote (public).

Yet, the party accepts this fact. They not only accept this, they spend several millions of dollars a year to tell me that they are glad that I belong to the family. They validate my space of belonging. They never suggest that if I *really* want to belong I will need to become more committed. They never hint that if I would come closer to the organization I would be an *authentic* republican. They express their gratitude. They convey their comfort with the fact that I belong the way I want to belong. They are glad I belong.

They believe that I am committed. They are aware that I show up to vote every time the polls are open. I am committed. I vote.

In the 2000 presidential election, Florida created a controversy by not knowing who actually received the electoral vote. This turned out to be the deciding state vote. During the next several days, I (and several public belongers to both parties) became more involved. When the family was in trouble, those who have been accepted as family came to the party’s aid.

In our search to build community, we could help people to experience belonging in the space they would like to experience it. Community *is* built in four spaces; Public, Social, Personal, and Intimate.

Be at peace, people connect and are motivated to commit in all four spaces. It is our charge to invite the stranger in. We do not invite strangers in for intimacy. We invite them to no longer be strangers.

We give space, and they find family, a sense of belonging, and community.

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People long to belong, and so they’re in constant search for connection. As leaders, we can no longer take advantage of this. We cannot permit ourselves to label “authentic” only those connections *we* create for *them*. We can no longer pretend that forced

community works better than, or as well as, what really works – the community that arises when human beings spontaneously connect.

### **The Secret of Slime Mold (Emergence Theory)**

Slim mold offers us an interesting insight. There is no master planner calling the cells to unite. The coming together is spontaneous once there is a favourable environment. We humans could help by creating the healthy environments in which people naturally connect. If we would concentrate upon facilitating the environment instead of the result (people experiencing community), then we might see healthy, spontaneous community emerge.

### **Cultivating Fertile Soil**

The “community compound” may also have an equation. I suggest it looks something like  $Pu_8S_4P_2I$ . For every one part significant intimate belonging, there are two parts personal, four parts social and eight parts public.

### **Further thoughts on small groups**

- \$ Most join the group hoping for a significant *social* connection. They are looking for neighbours. Our culture yearns for significant social connections. People are searching for those who will care for them, but at an appropriate distance. They seek those who can help them discover who they are. They would not consider it “bad” to remain in social space for the duration of the group. Small group pastors have desecrated these groups as ones that are “not working,” when in fact these groups may be among the healthiest groups the pastor has.
- \$ Some come to a small group seeking a *personal* connection. The problem is the group may be too large for a healthy connection to form. The likelihood that eight to twelve people in the same room all have the need– and the competencies– to find personal space with one another are slim. This is especially true if they have been forced together by random selection. There is a greater likelihood of personal belonging emerging spontaneously in a group that self-organizes. Plus, most people who seek friends in personal space are looking for only one or two personal friends – not eight or a dozen.
- \$ We also muddle things by building expectations of *intimacy*. In fact, this is what we hope, promote and plan for. It would be far healthier to promote social or personal connection, leaving intimacy to groups with an appropriate number of people. Two is a good number.

### **Further thoughts on Belonging**

People connect and are motivated to connect in all four spaces. It is our charge to invite the stranger in. We invite them in so they will no longer be strangers.

Having visited a number of congregations, I am aware that most of them offer opportunities for community in all four spaces: public, social, personal and intimate. Yet almost all of them, including my own, have adopted a pattern of teaching attendees only two ways of belonging: public and intimate.

We may also communicate to people that they *don't* belong publicly. For example, we may dis-invite” visitors or first-time attendees to contribute financially to the church. It's the “in thing” to say, “Don't feel compelled to put anything in the offering when the plate passes by you. Those who call this congregation ‘home’ use this as a time of giving back to God a portion of the blessing he's brought to us.”

Yes, this may make some of our guests feel relaxed. But we may also be teaching them that:

1. We have a special relation with God. He has blessed us.
2. You don't. He has not yet blessed you. You must belong in a different way (space) to receive this blessing.

Similarly, we emphasize the intimate space of belonging to God. Prayer is taught as being a private conversation with God. Discipleship is represented as one-on-one relationship with a person who knows God in a deeper way than you do. Or we say, “If you really want to know what our church is about, you need to get involved in a small group.”

Notice that I am not saying that we must process people from public to social to personal to intimate.

Notice that I am not saying that “intimate” is our ultimate goal. Intimate is not the most important, the most real, or the most authentic relationship.

The secret is to see *all* connections as significant. When we validate the space where they are, we greatly increase our ability to bring help to their lives.

Each of the four spaces has specific parameters of action, language and real estate. The four relational spaces are not a process for growing healthy connections. Healthy community comes when we hold harmony among the spaces. Likewise, a congregation is healthy when it promotes significant belonging in all four spaces and helps people grow in each space. Assembly line processing through the spaces is not healthy.

Healthy community requires us to learn the appropriate behaviours in both the relational spaces and the gray areas between spaces.

Median spaces are the spaces that include our social and personal connections. Median spaces are where people experience “front porch.” Front porches are significant to our experience of community and belonging.

This median space has not disappeared from our culture. We need this space, and so we have built it elsewhere. Places like Starbucks [Tim Horton’s] provide a new front porch experience. It is the experience of social connection that draws people to stop in for a moment. We go to neutral place – a median space. These places provide the space between public and intimate. They provide the space for “personal and community” discussions. They provide the “front porch”.

“The next step is to teach people the significance of all their connections. Then, try to develop environments that unite with their learning styles. And then show people how to develop spiritual disciplines in the specific space where they connect with God”.

#### **Questions to consider:**

Make a list of all the things you belong to, and consider how significant they are to you life? Does everyone (person, club, organization, informal connections) know you belong?

How do you define who belongs? Look at your church - who fits in this definition and who does not?

In what ways does Meyer challenge your understanding of the role of small groups in the life of your church?

What would it look like to provide spaces for social interaction? Can you provide these spaces without any hidden agendas to move people to another space?

How uncomfortable are you with spontaneity? Do you always need to be in control?

Have you ever had the experience of seeing a group self organize in a spontaneous manner? What was the situation? Did the group exhibit health? Was it fun?

Have you experienced the four spatial belongings in your relationships with God? Your family? Your mate?

Do you have a comfortable “front porch” for people to connect to your congregation?

Define or describe what a good “date” would be between your congregation and someone seeking to connect?