

Week 4 – May 8th, 2022



INTRODUCTION

Several years ago, my wife and I made the decision to sell our house and move. Now, if you've ever moved before, you know it can be stressful. It takes a lot of work, a lot of time, and a lot of boxes. But for us, the most difficult part of moving wasn't the work, it was leaving our neighbors— friends we had known for years, friends with whom we had eaten countless meals together, friends who had walked with us through the ups and downs of early marriage. It was tough leaving these friends behind. Plus, we didn't have any friends like that waiting for us in our new city.

Maybe it's just us, but we discovered that making friends as an adult is *not* easy. You'd think that by the time you reach adulthood you'd have this figured out, but it turns out making friends in your 30s and 40s is just as difficult as when you were in middle school and high school.

So, instead of facing the difficulty and discomfort of making new friends, we initially just stayed in our house. We stayed to ourselves. We didn't really put ourselves out there and make ourselves vulnerable to new people. At first, we enjoyed that time together in our new space. But after several months of keeping to ourselves, we began to feel isolated—even alone. We knew we needed to form community with some new people. So, we began the awkward process of finding new friends in our mid-thirties.

TENSION

We've all experienced something similar. But it's not only when we move to a new city that we have a tendency to find ourselves isolated and alone. It's really any time we find ourselves in a new season of life. There's a tendency, in many of us, when we find ourselves in a new place in life to want to hang back, or to hide, and to isolate ourselves until we get comfortable in our new surroundings.

- Maybe you've started a new job and the idea of making friends at the office sounds a little overwhelming.
- Or maybe your job has been remote for so long during the pandemic that isolation has become your new normal.
- Maybe you moved to a new place, and now you're trying to figure out this new territory. Maybe you're in a situation like my wife and I were in when we moved, and you've thought, "I just don't have the energy to start again."
- Maybe for some of you it's an age thing. As you get older, you realize how much time friends take. Or maybe you're just tired, you feel you have enough going on in your life that you don't want to involve anyone else in the mix. It's just easier to do it alone.
- Maybe you're naturally introverted and it's just difficult in general to make friends.

For these reasons and probably dozens more, we can find ourselves choosing isolation over putting ourselves out there, choosing security over starting new relationships. And that's understandable.

But here's the thing: If we try to walk through new seasons without relationships, we'll miss so much of what God wants to show us or teach us in that season. The reason is because God often teaches us *through* the relationships we have with other people. *Doing life with other people is a lot of how we learn.*

When we enter a new territory, a new season, those are the times God most likely has our attention, right? So it makes sense that those are the seasons where we can learn the most. And God designed us to need community because we have the potential to grow within community.

Now, some people might say that if you just have God, then that's all you need—you don't need other people. And while that sounds spiritual, it's just not true.

All of us intuitively know we need more than God to survive. We all know that if we just had God and nothing else, we'd die. We need air. We need food. We need shelter. We need sleep. Some would say we need college football in the fall to survive. Just some.

God designed our bodies with needs other than just Him. And God also designed us to need relationships. Let me show you what I mean.

TRUTH

We find our need for community at the very beginning of God's Word. In the book of Genesis, we see that God created Adam in a perfect paradise setting. Still, God saw that one thing was missing for Adam: some company.

The LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him" (Genesis 2:18 NIV).

Remember, this happened before the world was broken by sin. Imagine for a moment what life would have been like in a perfect world. No secret sins, no struggles, no addictions. We can't even dream of what that would have been like. And yet, before any of those problems came into the world, there was still a problem with God's good creation. Even in a perfect world, Adam was lonely.

Which means, even in humanity's most perfect state of being, God made people to need others beside Himself. Which is amazing if you think about it. Even though a relationship with God fulfills us more than anything else can, He literally designed us to need someone other than Himself.

God models this for us. One of the great mysteries of God is that He is three distinct persons in one: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. This idea is known as the Trinity. Which means God is in relationship with Himself. So relationship is at the essence of who God is. It's the very heart of God. And because we're created in God's image, it only makes sense that we'd be relational as well.

When God created Adam, Adam found himself in the newest of territories, right? Life! And the first thing God did for Adam was create a companion for him. Throughout God's Word we see the necessity of community.

Fast forward hundreds of years to the early church. During the early church, community became even more vital. The new believers continually found themselves in new territory. They had a new faith. They had new values. Everything was new and unfamiliar. On top of all of that, being a Christian during this time could literally put your life in danger.

In this climate, the apostle Paul encouraged new believers to be there for one another. In his letter to the church in Rome, Paul spelled out just what this looks like in practice:

Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves. . . . 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 (Romans 12:10, 13-16a).

Notice the "one anothers" Paul mentioned.

Be devoted to one another.
Honor one another.
Share with one another.
Welcome one another.
Rejoice with one another.
Mourn with one another.

Live in harmony with one another.

Now, Paul didn't explicitly say, "Oh, and go find a friend." No, it's obvious that Paul knew that if Christians were going to survive and thrive in Rome, they were only going to do so together. They were people in new territory under new circumstances. They had to stick together. They had to treat one another well.

I don't think it's an understatement to say that the strong sense of community in the early church was a catalyst for the spread of the Gospel. The good news of Jesus is amazing. Life-changing. But you know what really amplifies that message? A strong community conveying that message—not just through words, but through how they treat one another. I mean, how appealing is it to find a group of people who are devoted to one another, honor one another, welcome one another, and sharing their lives with one another?

I think that Paul knew this critical truth:

The best way to get through new territory is to walk together.

In this case, this community of believers took part in spreading and growing the good news of Jesus throughout the world. And you know what? We can still be a part of that today.

APPLICATION

Now, that list of one anothers? It's a tall order. It's not always easy to find these types of friends. Honestly, I think most people don't have these types of friends. Why is that? Because people are scared to do what it takes to have them. Because having these types of friends takes two things: **transparency and consistency**.

Let's talk about transparency. We have to let people into our lives. Let's be real, this is a scary prospect. What are they going to see? What are they going to find? Are they going to be okay with what they find? What nerves are they going to hit? It's true, this level of relationship requires risk and vulnerability. But if we want to experience these kinds of relationships, we have to give people the opportunity to see and speak directly into our lives.

And being vulnerable can feel counterintuitive in our individualistic culture. But it's so crucial to finding real, authentic community—the kind of community we'll need to get through a new season.

Along with transparency, we need consistency. A big reason some people don't have "one another" friendships is because of the time and effort it takes to achieve those relationships. It takes work. Some of us may think it's too much work. Because, let's face it, showing up consistently to anything can be challenging. But to build community, it requires that we consistently spend time with people.

And listen, finding community is so worth it. Listen to how the apostle Paul described community here:

Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts (Colossians 3:16 NIV).

I just love the picture he gives of us growing in Christ Jesus through teaching one another, advising one another, and singing in worship with one another. It's such a great picture of experiencing the joy of Christ together.

So, if you're in a season of new, and you need some friends, actively seek them out. Volunteer in your community. Do something to expand your opportunities to meet new people. Maybe you can even get started here in this small group.

If you have friends, are you being transparent? Do they know what's going on? Are you seeing them on a consistent basis? Do you have the types of friendships where you're building, encouraging, and caring for each other? If not, take a step to be that kind of friend.

LANDING

I think being a friend to someone can be a spiritual activity. God obviously thinks relationships are important. He invented them! So when you're not with people and not enjoying community, it can feel like you're missing a part of your life and your purpose.

So, is being together and eating together, talking with another person, opening up about our doubts and fears with someone really that important? I think it's one of the most important things we do. Because it's in our togetherness we can find God and we can find the strength to make it through.

So, remember: Show up. Be transparent. Be consistent. Because **the best way to get through new territory is to walk together.**

Small Group Discussion



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Have you ever made decisions to make a change or not make a change based on the relationships you had? If so, describe what happened.
2. Have you ever started a new job, joined a new club, or moved to a new neighborhood and needed to build new relationships? Was that a hard or an easy experience? What made it that way?
3. Describe a situation you faced where people played an important role in your life.
4. Read Hebrews 10:25. What does this mean practically? And why is this important?
5. How would you define community? What characteristics make up a good community?
6. Do you have the type of community in your life that you want? If so, describe it. If not, are there changes in your life that you can make to find it?
7. Why does it sometimes seem easier to live in isolation?
8. How have you seen God use people in your life or in others' lives for the good?