Friendship Redefined

Week 1 Made for interdependence not independence.

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Let me propose an idea.

A good friend:

Not too long ago, I received a heartfelt message from a family member grappling with some anxiety and depression. My heart went out to her, and I knew I had to be there for her. Not as a pastor, but as family.

Sitting by her side, I gently encouraged her to articulate the storm of emotions within her. In a vulnerable moment, she slowly uttered three words that struck a chord with me, words I have heard many times as of late: "I am lonely."

Next steps cards:

I went through thousands of next steps cards from this last year representing many that live right in this area. People are very lonely.

NPR:

It’s not just our local church and the Fishers area.

NPR wrote an article recently entitled. “America has a loneliness epidemic.”[[1]](#footnote-2)

Today we begin a series on Spiritual Friendship.

I want to war against loneliness. I want you to have deep meaningful friendships.

This series will coincide with the short book I wrote called Friendship Redefined.

This all begs a great question.

Why are we being shaped to become increasingly lonely?

I cover a lot of specific examples in the book, but the bottom line is this.

There is social and spiritual warfare against God’s version of intimacy.

Let me give you four ways.

1. Culture is shaping us to value influence over intimacy.

Culture implies that a person with 1 million social media friends is more relational than someone with a few social media friends. It’s not the amount – it’s about the depth of connection.

1. Culture is teaching us that relational discomfort is “toxic” and we should “cancel” any people that don’t align with our preferences.

This doesn’t minimize the hurt that people feel or assume that all relationships could become healthy. I cover a lot more of this in the book. There are many research projects that counter this. In fact, most great ideas emerge from debate and most defining moments of deep intimacy arise from tension overcome. How can you know if your friendship is truly safe until its in a place where safety is deeply needed?

1. Our culture tends to hyper sexualize… everything.

Modern popular psychology has been so heavily influenced by Freud’s psychosexual theories, we don’t know how to do physical touch. Again, this doesn’t minimize the hurt that people feel or assume that all relationships could become healthy. Again, I cover a lot more of this in detail in the book. We are so afraid of touch and talk being viewed as sexual we are now avoiding them.

1. Culture values independence over interdependence.

We are taught that being in need of another person is a weakness or flaw. This is a denial of God’s design of humanity. You are made to need other people.

What does the Scripture say?

Genesis 2:18 (NIV)

“The Lord God said, ‘It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.’”

In this passage, God recognizes that Adam (the first man) is alone and decides to create a suitable companion for him, which leads to the creation of Eve, the first woman. This verse highlights the significance of companionship and relationships in human life, as well as the idea of marriage and partnership as an essential aspect of God’s plan for humanity.

Genesis 2:21-22 (NIV):

“So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man’s ribs and then closed up the place with flesh. Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.”

The word rib is “tsela,” which indicates a side, part, or chamber of something. In this biblical account, it describes how God took one of Adam’s ribs to create Eve. In a sense God made Adam into two.

Ephesians 4:11-12 (NIV):

“So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up.”

We are parts of a whole. God didn’t give one super man. He gave men and women with specific gifts. This means those same men and women NEED the gifting of others.

Let’s look at theological ideas based on the cumulative teachings of the Bible.

The Trinity: Perichoresis

In Christian theology, “perichoresis” (also spelled “perichōrēsis”) is a term used to describe the mutual indwelling, interpenetration, or co-inherence of the persons of the Holy Trinity - Father, Son (Jesus Christ), and Holy Spirit. It is derived from two Greek words, “peri” (around) and “chōrēsis” (to dance or make room for). Together, they convey the idea of a divine dance or interweaving relationship within the Godhead.

Baby Jesus: Incarnation

God sent flawless need (a baby) to become perfect fulfillment.

When heaven opened up to speak to the human heart God sent Jesus as a baby. Think of all the ways a baby needs to be cared for.

What do you do?

You are a puzzle piece. Accept the truth.

There are protrusions and intrusions.

Both are equally important if the puzzle piece is designed to fit into a greater picture.

Christian friendship leans first into need not comfort. Christian friendship also joyfully receives help rather than piously fakes independent wholeness. The more a group of friends embraces the joy of needing help and offering help the more it takes on real relational depth. Let me be clear. It is not a sin to need others. God himself chose to become human and took a physical posture that required assistance. As a baby, He relied on others for care and sustenance. Just like a baby needs a parent to survive, our dependence on others is not a flaw but a design allowing us to experience intimacy and connection."

Next Steps:

1. I want to introduce a new liturgy based on John 13:35. Here is how it will work. I will say the first part and you can respond.

Worship leader:

How will they know that we are Christs’ disciples?

Congregation:

By our love for one another.

1. Commit to participate and not just observe your church family. A posture of heart that leans in rather than out. On your next steps card simply write, I choose to lean in.
1. <https://www.npr.org/2023/05/02/1173418268/loneliness-connection-mental-health-dementia-surgeon-general> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)