

Wired for Connection

Week 2 - You are Incomplete Alone: Forming a right theology of relationships.

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Opening:

I want to offer a counter-cultural truth.

Standing alone does not make you stronger.

Though some very good things were produced with post-Enlightenment individualism, there are some unintended consequences that plague the West.

Listen to the work of research professor Dr. Aaron Ben-Ze'ev;

"Telling your beloved, 'You belong to me,' is common among lovers, but it is politically incorrect these days: Each of us is autonomous and should not belong to another person. Needless to say, no one literally belongs to anyone else. But can we speak about belonging in a psychological sense? I believe we can and should....Baumeister and Leary argue that the lack of belongingness causes various undesirable effects, including a decrease in the levels of health, happiness, and adjustment. They further assert that people who lack belongingness suffer higher levels of mental and physical illness and are more prone to a broad range of behavioral problems, ranging from traffic accidents to criminality to suicide." -Research Professor Dr. Aaron Ben-Ze'ev

You trying to be strong all by yourself, you working to not need anyone, you trying to protect your heart from potential hurt of others may not be making you stronger. It may be making you weaker.

You are made for connection. Our relational connections are what make us fully human. It's baked into us.

Listen to C.S. Lewis.

"All sorts of people are fond of repeating the Christian statement that 'God is love'. But they seem not to notice that the words 'God is love' have no real meaning unless God contains at least two Persons."-C.S. Lewis, Mere Christianity

You were formed from a family and deep down, even if you have worked to mute it, you long for real deep loving relationships.

I have never had anyone on their death bed ask me, "Can you set me in my Ferrari one more time?" or "Please Pastor Mike, I would like to hold my golf clubs while I die." No, people want their loved ones with them. They want to hold their spouse's or child's hand as they die.

Let me say this before we continue:

I think people are really lonely. Especially those who work really hard to pretend they aren't.

Moreover,

The enemy wants to relationally wound or lie to you to the point where you think it's strong for you to need no one.

With this in mind let's read two sections of scripture:

Ephesians 4:11-16 ESV

"And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love."

Genesis 2:18-20 ESV

"Then the Lord God said, 'It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.' Now out of the ground the Lord God had formed every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens and brought them to the man to see what he would call them. And whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. The man gave names to all livestock and to the birds of the heavens and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper fit for him."

What do we see from this?

- The whole measure of the fullness of Christ comes through community.
- We cannot be like God alone. Think the Trinity. Again, we are formed from a family for a family.
- The different gifts and personalities are all from Christ and point back to Christ. What does it all do? Makes us whole.
- Define a few relational terms:
 - **Independent:** I don't need anyone. Even the Trinity is not independent. Independence is contrary to the very fiber of our created origin.
 - **Codependent:** Manipulation with selfishness as the core. You use other people for your own benefit.
 - **Interdependent:** Selflessness with the progress of both as the core. Posture of heart differentiates between codependency and interdependence.
- Let me talk for a moment about Three barriers to Christian community:
 1. An inward bend, pride. Pride is literally the prime poison to real relationships. If you are asking the question, "What can this group do for me?" without asking, "What can I do to elevate them?" you are bringing at best codependency to the community. The more you love others over yourself the more the community can grow relationally.
 - *"Our pride and need for personal significance (and autonomy) necessarily leads to competition, disunity, and strife. A life after self-glorification makes real unity and love between people impossible."* -Timothy Keller, *Every Good Work*
 - *"The person who loves their dream of community will destroy community, but the person who loves those around them will create community."* — Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*
 2. Past pain that hasn't been dealt with. You have been relationally hurt and instead of working through your pain you work forward with a posture of self protection.

- Ryan North says it well. *“Our brains are wired for connection, but trauma rewires them for protection. That’s why healthy relationships are difficult for wounded people.”*-Ryan North
 - If you are held back by past pain and you know it, I encourage you to do two things. 1) Confess it. 2) Be willing to get Christian counsel.
3. You want Christ and Christianity to be a secondary tribe in your life. Your relationship with God is the most important relational tribe you will have. It will feed or starve your capacity to participate well in every other relationship.
- Your Christian tribe is greater than your education tribe.
 - Your Christian tribe is greater than your national tribe.
 - Your Christian tribe is greater than your sports tribe.
 - Your Christian tribe is greater than your political tribe.
 - Your Christian tribe is greater than your ethnic tribe.

Final Thoughts:

Give me a few minutes to share Some of the greatest joys of Christian community:

- Peace: You don’t have to master what you aren’t gifted to master. You have others. Life gets way easier when you don’t try to be what you are not.
- Wholeness: The more you live into how God made you and where he created you to need another the more whole you can become.
- Purpose: In the Christian tribe you find purpose. Not only from your unique shape here and now but eternity.

Where is Jesus?

Jesus gave up everything for his tribe, humanity. He even gave all for those in His tribe who were hurt and lost, even those who were hurting others. He is part of the perfect Trinity, the perfect family. He invites us back into the greatest of families. Accepting the cross is accepting the invitation back into family.

Next Steps Cards:

- What tribe are you most committed to?
- Are you willing to confess and work on your capacity to grow in spiritual relational prowess?

Resources:

- Psychology Today, Why we all need to belong to someone.
<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/in-the-name-love/201403/why-we-all-need-belong-someone>
- *Every Good Endeavor* by Timothy Keller
- *Mere Christianity* by C.S. Lewis
- *Life Together* by Dietrich Bonhoeffer
- English Standard Version of the Bible