

No person has ever walked our earth and been free from the pains of loneliness. Rich and poor, wise and ignorant, faith-filled and agnostic, healthy and unhealthy have all alike had to face and struggle with its potentially paralyzing grip. It has granted no immunities. To be human is to be lonely.

To be human, however, is also to respond. The human person has always responded to this pain. The response has varied greatly. Sometimes loneliness has led us to new heights of creativity, and sometimes it has led us to drugs, alcohol, and emotional paralysis; sometimes it has led us to the true encounter of love and authentic sexuality, sometimes it has led us into dehumanizing relationships and destructive sexuality; sometimes it has moved us to a greater depth of openness toward God and others, to fuller life, and sometimes it has led us to jump off bridges, to end life; sometimes it has given us a glimpse of heaven, sometimes it has given us a glimpse of hell; sometimes it has made the human spirit, sometimes it has broken it; always it has affected it. For loneliness is one of the deepest, most universal, and most profound experiences that we have.  
(Ronald Rolheiser, *The Restless Heart*)

I recently read that we are living in what is being called the “friendship recession” and that we are in an “epidemic of loneliness and isolation.” (View the online sermon for related photos and charts.)

There are all kinds of reasons for this:

- My personality
- As an introvert, I’m always regretting the plans I made when I was in an extrovert mood for five minutes
- My unique hobbies (Dostoevsky + WB Yeats poetry, anyone? Exactly.)
- Our culture
- Geographical mobility
- Political polarization
- Busyness (parenting, kids’ sports, work functions, etc.)
- Drama
- Infrastructure

Mother Teresa said, “Loneliness is the leprosy of the modern world.” Does anyone else feel this? We’re more connected than ever, but more distant than we realize. What is the solution? How do we build relational abundance in the midst of a relational recession?

We’re continuing our series called The Seven today and talking about community. As a church we want to prioritize community. We express that priority in the following way: we value relationships and want to build our lives together as family.

I want to talk about (1) why you need community and (2) how you can find it. I’ll do this from the life of an Old Testament character, David.

### Why you need community

- (1) You need people to vie for you: David and Nathan

After the king was settled in his palace and the Lord had given him rest from all his enemies around him, he said to Nathan the prophet, “Here I am, living in a house of cedar, while the ark of God remains in a tent.” Nathan replied to the king, “Whatever you have in mind, go ahead and do it, for the Lord is with you.” (2 Samuel 7:1-3)

I remember first starting ministry here, fresh out of college, young, didn’t know what I was doing *at all*, and having a friend speak the words “humble confidence” over me to keep me humble, but to also raise me up! I have had several people speak that particular phrase into my life—people from various walks of my life who intentionally pulled me aside at certain points and said the same two words to me. To call me *out* of myself and to call me *beyond* myself.

We all need that from others, and that is what Nathan does for David here. He gives him the promises of God for his life. But that’s not all Nathan does for David.

David burned with anger against the man and said to Nathan, “As surely as the Lord lives, the man who did this must die! He must pay for that lamb four times over, because he did such a thing and had no pity.” Then Nathan said to David, “You are the man! This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: ‘I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you from the hand of Saul.’” (2 Samuel 12:5-7)

Tyson said, “If you have no conflict with the community in your life, you are networking, not living in relationship.”

A fellow named Marcus in second century Carthage (Tunisia, Africa) converted to Christ. The church told him to quit his profession in the theater because his job made it difficult to maintain holiness, so Marcus quit his job. But this created a financial problem for him, so he decided to teach acting. This caused the church some trouble because they thought that that wasn’t right either. Marcus’ pastor, Eucratius, wrote to his spiritual mentor, Cyprian of Carthage, who said: “No, Marcus can’t work teaching either.” No compromise, no breathing room. Personal holiness matters. Cyprian told Eucratius, “You should do your utmost to call him away from this depraved and shameful profession to the way of innocence and to the hope of his true life...”

If I were to sum this up in a Facebook post, I’d say this: you need friends who will help/push you to live into God’s purposes for your life. You need people to vie for you. We need people in the trenches with us and we need people able to speak the truth to us, people who will pour courage into our hearts and who will kick us in the behind when we’re acting a fool. You need people to vie for you.

So, who’s pushing you? And encouraging you? And telling you the truth? Bringing accountability? I have countless stories of people who did that for me. Who’s doing that for you?

(2) You need people to ride with you: David + his mighty men

You need people to help you pursue the mission. The Netflix series *Untold: Swamp Kings* tells the story of the complete overhaul of the Florida Gators football team. Brandon Siler was one of the first players to buy in to coach Urban Meyer’s system. One of the rules for ab workouts was that if anyone let his feet touch the ground, they restarted the session. One player showed up late, causing a restart, then let his feet touch the ground, causing another restart. Siler told him, “If you put your legs down and make us do this again, I’ll punch you in the face.” The player did; Siler did. Siler and the other players on the team pushed each other to the end.

King David also had this in his life. He had his “mighty men”—men of exceptional bravery and military prowess who helped him during his reign.

These are the names of David’s mighty warriors: Josheb-Basshebeth, a Tahkemonite, was chief of the Three; he raised his spear against eight hundred men, whom he killed in one encounter.

Next to him was Eleazar son of Dodai the Ahohite. As one of the three mighty warriors, he was with David when they taunted the Philistines gathered at Pas Dammim for battle. Then the Israelites retreated, but Eleazar stood his ground and struck down the Philistines till his hand grew tired and froze to the sword. The Lord brought about a great victory that day. The troops returned to Eleazar, but only to strip the dead.

Next to him was Shammah son of Agee the Hararite. When the Philistines banded together at a place where there was a field full of lentils, Israel’s troops fled from them. But Shammah took his stand in the middle of the field. He defended it and struck the Philistines down, and the Lord brought about a great victory.

During harvest time, three of the thirty chief warriors came down to David at the cave of Adullam, while a band of Philistines was encamped in the Valley of Rephaim. At that time David was in the stronghold, and the Philistine garrison was at Bethlehem. David longed for water and said, “Oh, that someone would get me a drink of water from the well near the gate of Bethlehem!” So the three mighty warriors broke through the Philistine lines, drew water from the well near the gate of Bethlehem and carried it back to David. But he refused to drink it; instead, he poured it out before the Lord. “Far be it from me, Lord, to do this!” he said. “Is it not the blood of men who went at the risk of their lives?” And David would not drink it. Such were the exploits of the three mighty warriors.

Abishai the brother of Joab son of Zeruah was chief of the Three. He raised his spear against three hundred men, whom he killed, and so he became as famous as the Three. Was he not held in greater honor than the Three? He became their commander, even though he was not included among them.

Benaiah son of Jehoiada, a valiant fighter from Kabzeel, performed great exploits. He struck down Moab’s two mightiest warriors. He also went down into a pit on a snowy day and killed a lion. (2 Samuel 23:8-20)

David had guys like:

- Josheb-Basshebeth: chief among the captains; killed 800 men at one time
- Eleazar: fought alongside David against the Philistines
- Shammah: defended the agricultural economy of Israel
- Abishai: chief of David’s men; killed 300 men in battle
- Benaiah: slew two heroes of Moab, a lion in a pit on a snowy day, and a formidable Egyptian warrior

I love that. But here’s the thing: if our vision of community is only about how this person or group can meet my relational needs, then we’re missing it. We need to find friends who will be missional with us, pushing us to be kingdom workers in our homes, in our workplaces, and in our community.

Who are you on mission with? Who’s riding with you to pursue that?

David had his mighty men. Moses had Aaron and Miriam. Esther had Mordecai. Jesus had his disciples. Paul had Barnabas. Timothy had Paul.

(3) You need people to die for you: David and Jonathan

After David had finished talking with Saul, Jonathan became one in spirit with David, and he loved him as himself. From that day Saul kept David with him and did not let him return home to his family. And Jonathan made a covenant with David because he loved him as himself. Jonathan took off the robe he was wearing and gave it to David, along with his tunic, and even his sword, his bow and his belt. (1 Samuel 18:1-4)

The significance of this gift was that Jonathan recognized that David would one day be king of Israel. Rather than being envious or jealous, Jonathan submitted to God's will and sacrificed his own right to the throne. Jonathan was dying to himself to lift David up

We forget just how NOT self-sufficient we actually are. It's like in every phase of life, we feel like we're the master of our fate, the captain of our own ships. But as much as it hurts our pride, we need people sacrificing for us. When you're young, your parents sacrifice a lot. Even when you're middle-aged and think of yourself as self-sufficient, you have to realize that your everyday existence still depends on a whole society of people, and then you get older still and need others helping you again. That's life: dependence. There's no escape from it.

These are the kind of relationships we need in the church: a community of sacrificial love for one another.

Remember Marcus, who we talked about earlier? Cyprian also told Eucratius, Marcus' pastor, "You should do your utmost to call him away from this depraved and shameful profession to the way of innocence and to the hope of his true life...let him be satisfied with the nourishment provided by the Church, more sparing to be sure but salutary." And then later, "And if your church is unable to meet the cost of maintaining those in need, he can transfer himself to us and receive here what is necessary for him in the way of food and clothing."

This is our call, too. You need people in your life who will sacrifice their time, energy, and resources for you. You need shared hearts and shared commitment. You need people to "one another" you. No matter how self-sufficient you feel, how in control you're perceived to be, you need others. Plain and simple.

You need people that are the answers to questions like: When and with whom will I confess the areas that I am giving in to temptation? Who do I need to call on because my marriage is unraveling? Who can I pray with about the deep longings of my heart? Who am I talking to about the challenges I face as a single woman or man in a hook up culture?

To overcome a relational recession, you need to realize the importance of community: people who'll vie, ride, and die for you.

### Finding community

Now let's talk about how you find that kind of community. Because here's the thing: It's not obvious that vie for you, ride with you, die for you friendships are easy to find. So, three quick things on this:

*Show up.*

When I first started at The Creek, I did one of the most vulnerable things. Caroline came into my office asking for advice on starting a life group and I was like, “Wisdom, wisdom, wisdom,” and then, “Can I join you guys?” I invited myself into the Lamkin’s life group. There may be no greater vulnerability than to say than to say to yourself “I need friends” or “I need community,” because behind those phrases, in the deeper recesses of the heart are things like “I’m lonely” or “I’m on a sin trajectory that I know will destroy me.”

Maybe the first step for you is reaching out. Maybe it’s saying, “Hey, want to get a coffee?” Maybe it’s introducing yourself to the person behind or in front of you or lingering out in the hall. Maybe it starts by serving somewhere here in the church. Maybe it begins with Rooted in the Spring. Shoot, maybe it means actually *showing up* to your life group. Maybe it means not simply showing up to life group, but showing up emotionally and mentally to life group!

If you want community, you have to show up. But community also requires more than that.

*Be vulnerable.*

You will not build a community without being vulnerable. Too often we forsake vulnerability for surface-level sharing.

Sharing is:

- I’m struggling in my marriage.
- I’m really stressed out at work.
- I’m struggling in my walk with God.
- My wife and I are going through a rough patch.

Vulnerability is:

- Our shouting woke up the kids last night, and someone threw something.
- I’m taking pills to fall asleep because otherwise, I can’t settle down.
- Ever since I read that book, I’m starting to think that this whole faith is a fiction.
- I’m flirting with a colleague on a text chain.

You see the difference? The reality is that if you can’t get to the vulnerability, you’ll never be known. And if you’re never known, you’ll never feel like you have community. And if you never feel like you have community, you’ll continue to feel alone and like you’re in that relational recession. If you always wear a mask, then the mask is all people will ever know. They won’t know *you*. You have to be vulnerable *and* allow people to be vulnerable with you if you want community.

*Embody the gospel.*

So much of isolation is because of fear or shame. So much of relational damage is because of pride or selfishness. It’s hard to build community when sin is rampant. But thank God for the gospel—the fact that you and I are accepted not because of ourselves, but despite ourselves.

Have you seen the painting “The Hand of God” by Yongsung Kim? This is the foundation for Christian community. This is gospel. God takes us in. God accepts us. God wants community with *you*.

And it's for *this* reason we can create the kind of community we long for. Think about it. Building a circle of relationships where people consistently vie for, ride with, and die for one another is not simple! How do you get that?

Imagine you're here at church and you've got drama with the person next to you. Maybe there's lying or gossiping. Maybe there's jealousy or envy. Maybe there's a place where forgiveness and repentance need to happen. Maybe they're too detached and you're too needy. Maybe you're too conflict-avoidant and they are, too, so you never address the issue. Or maybe you're at this place where you're like, "I don't really want to associate with them." Or you're like, "How can I be vulnerable? Won't I be rejected?" How do you overcome that kind of stuff?

Well, this is where the gospel becomes practical:

- Think about the *humility* that comes from the gospel because you realize that you're not better than anyone else!
- Think about how the gospel says you can't be *impartial* because you realize you're here by sheer grace just as much as anyone.
- Think about how the gospel propels you towards *forgiveness*—how can you withhold forgiveness from someone if God doesn't withhold it from you?
- Think about how the gospel brings *security*—you're already accepted! There's nothing you can do to rescind your invitation to the table, so you don't have to wear a mask or pretend or amend things or avoid conflict because of a fear that you might be ostracized. God's got you all the way.
- Think about the *power* you get from the gospel, from realizing that you are here because this king's forgiving, self-denying, self-sacrificing, burden-bearing example gives you the resources you need to be forgiving, self-denying, self-sacrificing, burden-bearing for others in your relationships.

So, we know *why* we need community and *how* to take steps towards it. Here's how I'll end...

### Becoming the community you long for

In Acts 2, the disciples devoted themselves "to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer."

You need community for all the reasons mentioned, but here's the kicker: People need that from *you*, too. God invites us in. Will we be the kind of people God is calling us to become? Will we create the kind of culture for this kind of community to form? That's what we're doing here at The Creek.

When we say we value community as a church it means that we value relationships and want to build our lives together as family. Will we devote ourselves to such a mission?

That is my prayer: for you to find that community here, for this church to be that place, for you to be that kind of friend, for you to know Jesus as your friend and to be able to share that spiritual companionship with others.