

WE NEED EACH OTHER

As Americans we idolize independence. In America we have the Declaration of Independence. We like songs like “I’ve Got to Be Me,” “I’ll do it my way,” I don’t need anybody to tell me what it’s all about. We honor the Lone Ranger. We love the Lone Ranger. Of course even the Lone Ranger had Tonto but we like the idea of being totally independent. We have bought into a myth that says that the key to happiness is independence. If I have relational independence, financial independence, independence in every other area of my life, if I don’t let anybody get too close to me but I’m totally self sufficient, then I will be happy. And yet every year the suicide rate tends to rise. Obviously that’s not true. God says that the key to happiness is not independence but inter-dependence. We need each other. We belong to each other. We need community in our lives. God wired you to go through life not as a solitary individual but in community.

The Bible says in Romans 12 ***“Since we are all one body in Christ we belong to each other and each of us needs all the others.”*** We need each other. God says community is not optional. You may not feel it. You may feel like “I’m very self sufficient. I don’t need other people in my life.” But the truth is you absolutely have to have other people in your life if you’re going to be all God wants you to be.

Today we’re going to look at why we need each other. Why we need God’s family specifically the five reasons God says you need other people in your life and why you need a small group.

1. I need others to walk with me.

What does that mean? It means I need you to help me grow spiritually. Colossians 2:6-7 says ***“Just as you received Christ Jesus the Lord so walk in Him.”*** Did you know that the Bible often compares life to a walk? Why? Because you’re on a journey. You don’t just sit still in life. You’re not where you used to be. You’re not where you’re going to be. You’re on a journey. So it calls the spiritual life, the Christian life, a walk. Throughout the New Testament we’re told to walk in wisdom, to walk in love, to walk in light. We’re told to walk in obedience, in the Spirit, walk as Jesus walked. Many, many other ways the Bible tells us that we are to live life.

But one of the key ways that God tells us to walk is this: you were never meant to walk through life alone. This has nothing to do with whether you're single or married. There are single adults in our church who are very involved in deep, intimate, meaningful community with other believers. We also have married couples in our church who are desperately lonely.

Some of you say, "What's wrong with walking alone? I like walking alone. In fact, I prefer it. I can go at my own pace, my own speed. I don't have to wait for anybody. Whatever. I like walking alone." You may like it but you need others to walk with you.

Let me give you three reasons.

1. It's safer. Walking through life with other people in your life is safer. It's less risky. Have you ever had to walk through a dark alley at night by yourself? It can be scary. It's safer to walk through life with others.

2. It's supportive. What I mean by that is it keeps you from giving up. When you're walking with other people you get the energy to keep on going that you wouldn't have. Have you ever been running and you start getting a little pain and you want to give up? But if you have other people walking with you, you can keep on going.

If you've ever watched in the fall when a flock of geese are flying south and they're in "V" formation. Do you know why they do that? Because it creates an uplift in the back draft and it makes it easier and they can fly farther and longer when they fly together.

The same is true in your life. You're going to burn out in life if you go through it without any meaningful intimate relationships. It's safer. It's supportive. Not only that but...

3. It's smarter. It's just smarter to go through life with a few really close deep friends. You learn more by walking with others than you do by yourself. Proverbs 28:26 says "*Only fools trust in what they alone think.*" In other words if I'm the only one who thinks this and nobody else agrees with me, guess what? I'm wrong. You may be walking in the wrong direction. But if you're walking by yourself through life you don't have anybody to go, "We're off the path. We missed it. We've got to get back on the path." The Bible tells us "*In a multitude of counselors there is safety.*" Proverbs 11:14

One of the things that's very important that you learn when you walk with others is you learn how to get along with other people. If you go through life isolated, never let anybody get close to you, never cooperate with anybody you don't learn how to cooperate. And that's one of the great lessons of life.

The Bible says this in Genesis 2:18 *"It is not good for man to be alone."* That's the first thing God said after He created Adam. He looked down at a perfect environment, the Garden of Eden, and said, "It's not good. It's not good for man to be alone." God hates loneliness. He hates it. God hates loneliness.

So what's His antidote? He created two groups. Physical family and a spiritual family. The physical family is the one you grew up in. The spiritual family is the one you have the rest of your life. It goes on into eternity. The physical family eventually moves apart, eventually dies and doesn't go on. But the spiritual family, God's church, is going to go on forever and ever and ever. So God says I want you to be connected in My family, the church.

That's what God wants in your life and He wants it for all of us. He wants us to be healthy and growing and full of love. That's my prayer for you as your pastor. I want you to be healthy and I want you to be growing and I want you to be full of love. There's only one way you can do that. You've got to get with other Christians to walk through life with you.

We need people to walk with us.

2. I also need others to work with me.

I need people to work with me. The Bible says God put you on earth to do a certain work that only you can do. Ephesians 2:10 says this *"God made us to do good works which He planned in advance for us to live our lives doing."* Before you were even born God decided the talents that He was going to give you. The natural abilities He was going to give you. The background. He even chose where you would be born, who your parents would be, when you would be born, and all of this. Because He has a purpose for your life and part of that purpose is He has some work for you to do.

Anytime you use your talents or your abilities to help somebody else there's a word for that. It's called *ministry*, or service. All of us are ministers. There's one pastor, but all of us are ministers.

Remember we've talked about this. Life on earth is practice for eternity. You get a hundred years at the most on earth, you get trillions of years in heaven. One of the things you're going to do in heaven is you're going to serve God.

What happens here on earth though is you're worn out. You're exhausted. You're burned out. Some of you came to church exhausted. Why? Because you're trying to do it all and you're trying to do it all by yourself. God never meant for you to go through life walking alone or working alone. You need to be in relationship with others who help you get done what you need to do. Otherwise you're going to be worn out and fatigued all the time.

God tells us in the Bible why we're supposed to work together. Ecclesiastes 4 *"Two people are better than one. Because they get more done by working together."* They get more done by working together! Everybody knows this. You get more done as a team than you do as an individual. It's also a whole lot more fun. It's also less tiring. You learn to cooperate together. There's all kinds of benefits to working together.

Here, we just completed our Christmas Offering. We set the need before you and asked everyone to consider a special Christmas gift to God. One person could not have afforded all the amount needed to make this church building accessible so that everyone is able to come and worship. So instead, many of you pitched in together. And together over 16 thousand dollars were given to God. Together we can make a difference if everybody does just a little.

Community is God's answer to fatigue.

I need people to walk with me through life and I need people to work with me through life, but also...

3. I need others to watch out for me in life.

I'm talking about people who'll defend me, stand up for me, protect me. Who will help me keep staying on track, watch my backside, warn me. We all need this because we all have blind spots.

The Bible says in Philippians 2:4 ***“Look out for one another’s interest, not just your own.”*** If you want a counter culture verse that’s it. In America, the general idea is it’s all about me. It’s all about my needs, my interest, my wants, my desires, my ambitions. Forget you! I live for myself. Forget everybody else. This verse says don’t just look out for your own interest, look out for others too.

Have you ever seen these Neighborhood Watch signs. They are a sign of community. It says we watch out for each other here. We’re looking out for each other. If you told your neighbor, “I’m going to be gone for a couple weeks. Would you kind of keep an eye out on my house. Look out for my stuff.” We all want our stuff looked out for! That’s a good thing to have your stuff looked after, watched out for.

But my question is not is anybody watching out for your stuff. It’s is anybody watching out for your soul. Your soul is a whole lot more important than your stuff. Is there anybody in your life who helps you stay on track spiritually? Is there anybody who loves you enough to say, “I’m not going to let you get discouraged. I’m not going to let you drop out. I’m not going to let you get tired. I’m here with you. Let me support you.” And they encourage you in your spiritual life. We all need that!

The Bible says in Hebrews 13:1 ***“Keep being concerned about each other as the Lord’s followers should.”*** We should care about each other. We’re family. We’re in God’s family. As brothers and sisters I should defend you and you should defend me and I help you stay on track and you help me stay on track.

It says, “keep being concerned.” That means not just once. You’re vigilant.

For the last 20 years we’ve all been a whole lot more vigilant for each other with terrorism and things like that. But did you know that you have an enemy far more destructive than terrorists? You have a personal enemy. He wants to defeat you. His name is Satan. Satan wants to mess up your life. Satan wants to bring problems into your life. He wants to hurt you as bad as he can.

Why would he do that? Because he can’t hurt God. What Satan wants to do is hurt God but he can’t.

When Satan attacks you, he doesn't come in a little red costume and a pitchfork and say, "Boo!" How does Satan mess up your life? Through habits you can't break, through hurts that you won't let go of and you hold on to the resentment, through hang-ups you can't change in your life, through problems and circumstances, through relationships that break your heart and hurt you. Most Christians try to fight him on our own. That's not smart. You're never going to win against the devil on your own. You need other people who will watch out for you and help you.

Ecclesiastes 4:12 *"A person standing alone can be attacked and defeated but two can stand back to back and conquer. Three are even better for a triple braided cord is not easily broken."* That's what a small group can do. We watch out for each other.

Here's my question. Is there anybody watching your backside? Anybody who's watching out for your spiritual welfare? Do you have anybody close like that? Are you in small group where that group of guys if you're a guy or women if you're a woman, who are saying, We're there when you're going through the tough times. We're not going to let you get discouraged. We're not going to let you get depressed. We're not going to let you get worried. We're going to be here with you.

Community is God's answer to defeat.

I need people to walk with me and work with me and watch out for me. **4. I need others to wait with me and to weep with me.**

To wait and weep. I'm talking about they wait while I'm waiting for the bad news. And they weep when I get the bad news. I need people with me in the inevitable crises of life, when the tragedies hit. I don't want to face that alone.

The fact is tragedies are going to happen to you. They're inevitable. You're going to have loved ones die. You're going to get bad health news. You're going to find out one day that you are dying. You need other people in your life. You don't have to go all the way through life totally unprepared for something that you know is inevitably going to happen. The time is now to build the safety net, the network of supporters, of friends. Get it in place now because at some point

the tragedy is going to happen. You don't know when. The time to prepare is now.

What is God's safety net? It is a group of other believers. You don't need a hundred. You only need five or six. But it's a group of other believers who are committed to you.

The Bible says this in 1 Peter 3:8 *"You should be like one big family full of sympathy toward each other."* When you're in the hospital you don't want the whole church to visit you. In fact, it'd be kind of bad if all of us came. But it would be nice to have a few come see you and say we're praying for you.

Here's God's plan, 1 Corinthians 12 *"If one member suffers all suffer together."* I read recently about a guy who died at home in his bed and nobody discovered it for two years. I thought how tragic! That a guy was not even missed for two years. Can you imagine the despair in that man's heart as he was dying in bed? Nobody should ever die alone. Nobody should ever have to go through that kind of despair.

Community is God's answer to despair. Romans 12:15 says *"Be happy with those who are happy and weep with those who weep."* We can do that in smaller groups.

The fifth reason I need other people in my life is... **5. I need others to witness with me.**

What do I mean by that? You have a life message that God wants you to share with the world. It's part of your mission. The Bible says that God put you on earth to do a mission. There is great power in group witness. God never meant for you to do your mission alone. God would never send soldier out by himself. He says we go out together.

What is the way you witness best to people who don't know the love of God? How do you witness best to them? God says it's by loving others in the family of God. Jesus said in John 13 *"Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are My disciples."* What impresses the community the most? When Christians – believers – love each other. The one thing that proves to the world that you're in the family of God, is that you love other people in the family of God.

That's what we want St. Paul to be known for. What impresses them is not our building, not our sermons, not our music, but that's the

place where you get loved. That's where they love you. That's the place where it's ok for a woman to stand up and say, "I just lost my husband. He walked out on me." That's the place where you're not perfect but they love you still. That's what we want to be known for.

God's answer to fear is love among God's family.

We all need each other. We need other believers to walk with us, to work with us, to watch over us, to weep with us and wait with us when we need to wait, and to witness with us. That is our declaration of interdependence.

There's an old Zambian proverb that says, "When you run alone you run fast. But when you run together you run far." Good words. Life is not a 50-yard dash. It is a marathon. You want to make it to the end of life. The only way you're going to make it to the end of life the way God wants you to is by having other people involved in your life. AMEN.