

God Never Meant for You to Grow Alone

It's a very old song: "No man is an island. No man stands alone." In the body of Christ, that's especially true. You cannot become the person God created you to be without the role of others in your life. For those of us who are fiercely independent, like me, that's a truth we love to challenge and resist. But you are not meant to grow alone.

Beyond our own desire to be independent, much of our pain and trauma has come at the hands of other people. Abuse, disappointment, rejection, misunderstanding, even violence, have characterized many of our human relationships. The pain seems too much. Why risk it? Wouldn't it be easier to just "grow alone?"

But that's not how God made you. If the purpose of your life was to be comfortable and "happy," then perhaps growing alone would be an option. But Jesus not only saved you *from* something; He saved you *for* something. And if you're ever going to become fulfilled, to feel satisfied, to know what it's like to be useful, then you're going to have to grow with people.

When we expect things from people that they cannot provide, we become hurt and disappointed. And when we fail to embrace what others do have to offer, we miss out on the transformation that can only come through human connections.

Here are some of the things that we can and cannot expect from others.

What Others Cannot Do for You

If you're older than a toddler (and you are, or you wouldn't be reading this), your life is not all about you. When you

look to others primarily to meet your own needs, you will become hurt, disappointed, disillusioned and bitter. We easily unconsciously expect friends, spouses, associates, church acquaintances and so on to do what is best for us. That just doesn't work.

Others cannot be responsible for providing all your physical and emotional needs. They cannot fight your spiritual battles for you. They cannot tell you what you need to do, be there for you 24/7/365, understand all your feelings, change because you want them to or do your healing or growing for you. Other people will never be able to provide the perfect example, support or unconditional love that you need and want.

People cannot be for you what only God can be. And they cannot do for you what you must do for yourself.

Some distort this truth into becoming a doormat. They accept and enable bad behavior and see themselves as at the mercy of those who would take advantage of them. That's not consistent with an accurate understanding of biblical truth. Jesus was in no way weak.

If you're feeling disappointed or bitter, consider whether you've been expecting from other people what they are unable to give.

Why You Need Other People

So why *do* you need other people? What role has God designed other people to play in your ongoing spiritual transformation? Here are some of those things.

Insight and Perspective. We all, without exception, have blind spots—to our own behavior and beliefs and to realities in our world. We must embrace the perspectives others can provide. Then we're responsible for evaluating their input and making intentional choices about what to do with the information. But without others giving us feedback, we're running blind.

Encouragement and Support. Though others cannot do our fighting or growing or healing for us, we do need their support. Think of it like climbing a mountain or crossing a river on slippery stones; you must move your own legs, but you're close enough to others to reach out to grab their hand when you need help. Doing life with others means you will be much more successful and impactful than trying to do it on your own.

Stimulus to Grow. The pain your brokenness causes others can be a powerful stimulus to change. And the pain caused when others bump up against your wounds can lead you to seek healing. A spouse may finally embrace the need to learn about intimacy or communication when the marriage is doomed unless something changes. A parent or leader can be pulled up short when seeing their own less-than-mature behavior mirrored in their child or team member.

Spiritual Support. We need each other's prayers. We need to know there are fellow believers experiencing similar challenges in this Christian life (1 Pet. 5:9). We need to have others we care enough about that we carry them in our hearts and prayers. Unless we do life with others in the body of Christ, our own spiritual life will be stunted.

How to Connect

How can you get the benefits of connecting with others without getting sidetracked by the risks? Here are three ways.

1. **Don't let pain surprise you.** If Jesus experienced misunderstanding, disappointment and even betrayal from His closest followers, don't expect that you will escape some of the same. Remember that God's goal for you is not your comfort, but your maturity and fulfillment. He weeps when you hurt, but those very hurts can become a vehicle of growth and meaning when you place them in His hands.

2. **Keep feeding yourself.** Stay hungry. Remember that you are responsible for your own emotional/spiritual nourishment. Keep your own soul intentionally filled up; doing so will make disappointment over others' behavior easier to move past and also allow you to have so much more to give them. The most important nourishment you need is personal time with God.
3. **Choose prayerfully.** Jesus did not invest the same way in every relationship. He invested most of His time and energy in those who needed and embraced what He had to offer or who could supply some of His needs. Prayerfully choose what relationships to invest your own time and energy in. Pray for God to bring the right people into your life, and then value what they have to offer.

May you experience the benefits of the people God needs you to be connected with in both giving and receiving.

Your Turn: *Are you embracing the value of the people God has placed in your life? Do you need to change anything about how you view personal relationships? Leave a comment below. {eoa}*

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