

How Most People Miss This Crucial Element in Their Connection to God

Community is a fundamental part of God's design for humanity. Connection to other people is not optional. It is not a troublesome complication. It is part of how God has designed us.

Relationship with God is the most important aspect of spiritual warfare. But sadly, many Christians have been tricked into missing how vitally important community is to their connection with God. If relationship with God is the bedrock of your life, then community is the fortress you build upon that foundation.

Community is not just the place you live; it is the culture that surrounds you, your family and your friends. In my view, there are three key ingredients to building and sustaining a healthy community: friends, fun and rest. These three things are the solution to 90% of the spiritual warfare I see in the lives of Christians. Whenever someone under demonic oppression comes to me, I ask about these three subjects. Every single time, I find that person is lacking in one of these areas—and usually, all three.

Take a Break

Jim, a second-year student at the school of ministry where I taught, walked into the room with his shoulders slumped and bags under his eyes. He apologized for being late.

"It's all right," I said. "You doing OK?"

He gave a half smile: "Oh, I'm fine. Work's been piling up. Two guys just quit, so there's a lot more work to go around."

The girls have soccer practice two times a week this year. I'm working on my new startup business as well, and I'm finishing up the editing on that book I've been working on."

"Aren't you guys in the middle of group projects as well?"

"Yeah, I'm helping out with three of them."

"How's that going?" I asked, feeling a concerned smile spread across my face.

He paused for a long moment, then said, "I think I got it. Just a few more weeks and things should get all lined up."

As he walked by, I noticed a small demon hanging off the back of his neck. It was no bigger than a hamster, with pale skin the color of raw chicken. Its mouth was pressed on the nape of his neck, reminding me of the way leeches latch to their hosts.

I see demons on people all the time. Most of the time they are gone in less than 24 hours, expelled by the normal process of healthy thinking. When we choose to let anger go and forgive, when we choose to push jealous thoughts away, when we stop and reevaluate our thinking, we remove the enemy's ability to influence us. Demons are opportunists. We eliminate their opportunity when we realign our thoughts to heaven.

Because of this, I am never quick to share when I see demons on people. Mentioning them can often make the problem seem bigger than it is, turning what would have been a one-day problem into something more complicated. I bit my lip as I watched Jim go, hoping that the next time I saw him, the little leech would be gone.

A few weeks later, I ran into Jim in the hall again. He did not look any better; in fact, the more I looked at him, the worse he looked. I leaned and peeked over his shoulder as casually as I could, looking to see if the demon was still

there. The bulbous little creature still hung from the back of his neck, and its pale pink body had swollen to three times its original size.

When I asked about his schedule, Jim told me he was still very busy, "but it's just a season. It's how I like to do it. Push hard and get it all done, then rest after."

Several weeks later, I saw Jim burst through the front doors of the school 20 minutes after class had started. Two more demons were following him. The leech demon was still hanging from his neck and had grown so large that it hung nearly to the floor. He'd taken on even more projects and responsibilities, and beyond that, he was now living with shame because he wasn't spending time with his wife and children.

I could have told Jim about the demon that was working to heighten his stress. I could have told him about the demon that was trying to turn his guilt about how his schedule was affecting his family into shame. I could have told him about the leech demon, but none of that would have helped. Demons were not Jim's problem. Jim's lifestyle was his problem. The pace of his life had made him vulnerable to stress and set him up for shame. The leech demon was not causing him to overpack his life; it was partnering with his draining lifestyle.

"Jim, what do you do for fun?" I asked. "What do you do just because you enjoy it?"

He paused for a long moment and then gave me a sheepish look.

"Work, I guess."

"When do you rest?"

He looked at me like I was leading him into a trap. "I mean, my wife and I watch movies sometimes, and I try to get enough sleep."

“Jim, there is nothing wrong with getting things done, but there is something wrong if you are hurting yourself and your relationships in doing it,” I said. “You have been exhausted for two months.”

He slumped his head back in his chair as if feeling it for the first time.

“Rest is not just about getting enough sleep,” I said. “It’s about living your life at a pace where you are usually full instead of usually empty. Fun is not just about diversion or amusement. It’s about doing things that you love just for the sake of doing them, not because of the results or something you hope to achieve.”

I suggested that Jim choose to keep the things that were most important to him but cut things out of his life until he was able to move at a pace where he could protect a lifestyle of fun and rest. He promised to do his best.

I checked in a week later. Jim had told his boss that he was able to train only one of the new employees, passed leadership of one of the second-year projects over to someone else and put his software project on hold until school of ministry was over. The stress and shame demons were gone, and the leech demon had shrunk to the size of a loaf of bread.

Another few weeks went by. Jim had started taking his kids to the park every day and took the whole family on a trip to the beach. He had started working on his book again, just a little bit at a time in the evenings. When I saw him after he got back from his vacation, the leech demon was gone.

Rest and fun are not optional parts of a healthy life. Peace and joy are both fruits of the Spirit, the manifestations of the transformative power of God in your life. Making time for rest and having fun are some of the most practical and effective ways to protect peace and joy in your life. Peace and joy are essential ingredients to an indestructible life.

Rest is not something we do to relieve exhaustion. Rest is a standard. It is choosing to live the rhythms of our lives with peace as one of our prime measures of success. Peace and rest are not excuses to be lazy or idle; they are the pacesetters that ensure we are able to finish the race. You can accomplish a great deal by living at a restful pace. In fact, you can accomplish a great deal more than you can by living frantically. Living frantically can trick us into thinking we are accomplishing more when, for multiple reasons, we are accomplishing less.

Just for fun, let's do a little experiment. Right now, count from one to 26 out loud. Time yourself to see how long it takes. Then recite the alphabet from A to Z. See how long that takes. Now alternate between the two so that you say, "A, one, B, two, C, three," and so on. See how long it takes to recite all 26 numbers and letters. Our brains are not designed for multitasking; switching between two different tasks takes more energy and slows us down. It does feel more frantic, though, which can trick us into thinking we're getting more done when we're not.

Living with rest as a standard helps us recognize when we are letting a frantic pace sabotage our growth and productivity.

Fun is not the same thing as distraction, amusement or entertainment. Fun is found in activities that we do purely for the joy we get out of doing them, not for the results we expect to get out of them. The Bible speaks constantly about joy being a foundational part of God's kingdom. We cannot hope to sustain joy in our lives if we do not make room for fun.

Fun looks different for all of us. Some of us find our joy in skiing, mountain climbing and camping. Some have fun with puzzles, board games and discussing their favorite show with a friend. Some are having the most fun when lying out on the beach with a good book in their hand, playing pickup basketball with friends or painting a landscape. Fun is deeply

spiritual; it protects and nourishes joy.

I have seen so many Christians tricked into building a mindset where they view rest and fun as wasteful and wrong. This is a horrible trap. Living without rest and fun does to your soul what going without food and sleep does to your body: It compiles your exhaustion, creates confusion and lowers your immune system. Having consistent periods of rest and fun built into your life protects your peace and joy. It keeps your soul healthy and whole and opens your heart and ears to the voice of God.

Jesus modeled this for us. There are several passages where Jesus took time to rest and pray, even when others were making demands on His time. God modeled this need from the very beginning of time. God, infinite and all-powerful, took a day of rest after creating the world and everything in it. He even made this day of rest part of the culture of His chosen people. He also built into that culture several yearly celebrations and holidays, many of which involve numerous days of revelry and fun.

God is the author of joy and peace. These are not just abstract feelings and virtues, but aspects of His nature that are meant to be manifested through His children. We cannot fully manifest the nature of God without building a life with room for rest and fun.

Talk to Friends

A few years ago, a friend of mine went through a hard time. His marriage had been shaky for nearly a year, and now his wife was beginning to move toward divorce. He wanted to keep working on the marriage; she did not. As my friend shared his story with me, I saw a dark figure standing behind him. It was covered in black and rotted strips of cloth from head to toe, and it held a cracked black dagger in its hand. Looking at it put a smothering weight in my chest.

"I don't know what's going to happen," my friend said, with a fair attempt at a smile on his face. "She doesn't want to make it official just yet, so I still have hope."

The dagger trembled at the word "hope" as if it were a vital organ it was desperate to plunge into. The weight in my chest grew heavier.

My friend continued, "I just wanted to let you guys know where we are, and I want to pull some of my closest friends closer while we're working through this." He named two other couples and a few of his single friends. "Feels smart."

I nodded.

"So, if it's OK, I'd like to just keep you updated, maybe process with you guys sometimes. And you can feel free to ask me how I'm doing or give me feedback about anything."

"We'd love to do that," April said.

Months went by. I checked in a few times, but my friend's wife was still steadily moving toward divorce. Every time I saw him, I saw the demon too, knife at the ready. Eventually, the divorce was finalized.

I was worried at first, having seen the attack that was coming against my friend. The enemy wanted to send him into depression, trick him into blaming and resenting his ex-wife or inflict whatever other pain and suffering he could squeeze out of this process.

Rather than let any of these potential attacks set in, my friend pulled his community even closer. He moved in with one of his single friends. He continued meeting with the couples that had been pouring into his life, and he continued meeting with his counselor.

I was visiting with my friend nearly a year after the divorce was finalized. He told me about how he felt closer and more

connected to God than he ever had before. He talked about how he felt more connected and loved by his community than ever before and that his life had never felt better. He was still working through the pain and was still sad about what had happened, but said all that God was doing was more than enough to make it through.

As he said this, I saw the demon with the knife stand up behind him. It reared the dagger high above its head, holding it with both hands. Its eyes flashed, and in them, I saw every terrible plan it had for my friend's life and every life connected to his. The knife came down with every ounce of the demon's hate driving it forward—but it glanced to the side well before it reached my friend's head, causing the demon to stumble to the ground. It gave a final shriek so severe that globs of its venomous green spittle flew, sliding off whatever invisible shield surrounded my friend. Then it turned and walked away. I never saw it again.

I weep now as I write this story, thinking of the avalanche of evil that did not come to pass in my friend's life. You would not believe the breadth of destruction the enemy wanted to cause through this single event in his life. He had an avalanching plan of darkness that would have sent sorrow and suffering well beyond the lives of my friend and his former wife. I saw it all in the demon's eyes the day he left. But none of it came to pass. None of it hurt my friend because when his dark night of the soul came, he pulled his friends close.

Human beings are fundamentally designed for relationship. Even our relationship with God is designed to function best in the context of community.

The Bible is full of passages that encourage connection, friendship and unity. We are designed to be surrounded by connections with other people. We need mothers and fathers, those who pour into our lives with their wisdom, experience

and insight. We need brothers and sisters, peers to run our race with. We need sons and daughters, people with whom we can share our wisdom, experience and insight. We need many different types of relationships, but for now, I want to focus on the power of friendships.

Ninety percent of the warfare I see would be completely solved by learning to develop healthy, connected and vulnerable friendships. This may sound like hyperbole, but it is true.

Our relationship to God is our most important connection, but connection to healthy friends is one of the most effective ways to protect our relationship with Him. Healthy friends tell you when you are acting like less than who you are. Healthy friends pull you out of the traps of the enemy even when your poor choices landed you in there. Healthy friends will tell you when you are believing lies. Healthy friends protect joy in your life.

Jesus was as connected to the Father as anyone could be, yet He still had friends—layers of them. He had the multitudes who followed Him, the Twelve who were His closest disciples, the three (Peter, James and John) who were His close friends and then one friend who was His closest: John. If Jesus needed friends, surely we do too.

I know this can be hard for some people. It can feel difficult or awkward to start friendships from scratch. Maybe you have experienced pain or betrayal through relationships. It is true that friendships are risky. But living without them is not just a risk; it's a danger. The enemy will use pain—hurt that people have caused us or hurt that we have caused others—to trick us into isolating ourselves. We are never at more risk than when we are alone.

While other aspects of spiritual warfare are more foundational, these three areas are where I see the most attacks getting through. These are also the areas where, when

corrected, I see the most profound change in people's lives.

God designed us to want and need full and complete lives. He designed us to need multiple layers of friends, to need peace and rest, and to desire fun and joy. We are meant to eat together, play games together, go on walks together, tell jokes together, cry together, live together and dream together. These things give us the opportunity to benefit from what God is doing in the lives of others and give out of the overflow of our own relationship with Him.

Community is not something you find. It is not finding people who like you or people you mesh with easily. Community is something you build on purpose.

Community is not just a group of friendly people who have the right number of potlucks, picnics, softball tournaments and Christmas parties. Community is built from the connections you forge with the people around you—connections you choose, build, steward and grow.

Please do not let the enemy trick you into thinking community is unimportant or of secondary importance. I watch the plans and attacks of the enemy fall to pieces when they come against people with healthy friendships, room for rest and a value for fun. These three things make room for the light of God to manifest in your life and shine into those around you. The tricks and lies of the enemy simply cannot live in this light.
{eoa}

Blake Healy is one of the senior team members at Bethel Church of Atlanta in Georgia. He is also an author and the director of the Bethel Atlanta School of Supernatural Ministry.

CHARISMA is the only magazine dedicated to reporting on what the Holy Spirit is doing in the lives of believers around the world. If you are thirsty for more of God's presence and His

Holy Spirit, subscribe to CHARISMA and join a family of believers who choose to live life in the Spirit. [CLICK HERE](#) for a special offer.