

What to Do When You're Lonely

I hear so many people talking about their longing for community and, all too often, lamenting their inability to find it. Maybe that's you? Perhaps you're reading this because you're longing to find a place of belonging and just never seem to connect.

I hear this particularly from people who live outside of the Bethel community, believing they can't have what we do because they don't live in Redding. This is simply not true! I love Redding and I love our Bethel community and I believe we do life and relationships well; I feel honored and blessed to be part of it. However, a healthy and thriving community is not exclusive to our church and town.

Whether you long for a community like ours in Bethel, or even if that's never crossed your mind, the desire for a healthy, life-giving community of people who do life together is a very real and valid one. But like most good things in life, community doesn't just magically "happen" to you. So then, how do you find it?

Community Is God's Idea

Community is a big deal to God—so much so that He breathed it into the heart of man when He created him. In Genesis, when God created everything on the earth, He is referred to in the singular. It is not until He creates man that He is referred to in the plural: "Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness'" (Gen. 1:26).

Not long after that, He said, "It is not good that the man should be alone," and went to great lengths to find a suitable companion for man—creating all the animals and eventually finding the perfect partner in the creation of woman. Let's also consider the fact that we are born out of a union of two people joining together. As we come into this world, we are

automatically inserted into a community of our family.

What Are You Sowing in Community?

The desire for community is natural and appropriate, as we can see in Genesis, and it should be pursued. But if you are longing for community and can't find it, then maybe you are the one who is supposed to bring it to the people around you! You carry the blueprint for community inside of you, and the world is waiting for you to show up in that way. Again, I am not denying the very real need to live in community; in fact, I am one of the loudest voices you'll hear telling you that finding your people is one of the most important things you can do in this life. But sometimes we need to take the focus off getting a need met and instead put our energy into meeting that same need in someone else.

Paul tells us, "He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully" (2 Cor. 9:6). We often hear this verse preached in the context of finances, but it is foolish to believe God only cares about giving money (after all, He gave His Son). There is so much more you are able to sow—your time, your gifts, your encouragement, your heart. And not because He needs it, but because whatever you give (sow) bountifully, you will also reap bountifully!

Shift Your Heart and Focus

God is not blind to the needs and desires of your heart; He is the one who put them there, and He is beckoning you to walk into them. But it requires a shift in your heart and perspective and a willingness to step out in faith. I urge you to look at your surroundings with new eyes; not to find what you're looking for, but instead for where you can start planting seeds for your future harvest. Building a community doesn't have to be complicated, but it also doesn't happen overnight.

Instead of just meeting people and waiting for something to happen, start inviting people to do things. Begin with hosting game or movie nights at your house, or organizing group outings. Then after you do it once, do it again. And again. And remember while you're leading in these endeavors that you have the ability to host the Holy Spirit, and His presence will create an atmosphere that allows people to rest, be safe, be vulnerable and connect in a real way, which is ultimately what you're longing for. It doesn't have to be forced or rushed; give it time and have fun. After a while, you will soon start building real connection with people, and one day you'll look around and realize you've not only found what you were looking for, you've created it.

Have you been a catalyst for your community? I'd love to hear your thoughts and ideas for building strong community in the comments! {eoa}

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