

Why You Can't Live the Christian Life as a Lone Ranger

Few people experience lasting spiritual growth in isolation. God never intended us to grow alone. He created us with the need, desire and capacity for authentic intimate personal relationships because that's His nature, and because that's the space in which we grow best. Community by design is God's laboratory where your ongoing spiritual transformation happens.

Recently, we talked about the Five Catalysts for Spiritual Growth, and significant personal relationships is one of these important ingredients. This is not a checklist item, as in how often did you show up for church, or how regularly did you attend your small group meeting? This is simply a reflection of the way human beings function best.

Think back to when you first experienced Christ. Most likely that happened because someone invited you to hear the gospel, or because a parent or other adult invested in your spiritual training when you were a child or because a friend demonstrated to you that Jesus had something to offer. And whatever healing and growth you've experienced since then has almost certainly involved close personal relationships.

Other people cannot fight your spiritual battles for you, do your growing for you or play junior Holy Spirit in your life. But here are a few ways other people can help your spiritual transformation.

- **1. Inspire you by example.**

Seeing someone else act like Jesus when faced with trouble,

apply some New Testament truth to their own life, overcome a character challenge, forgive when wronged by others or unselfishly minister to those in need should inspire and perhaps convict you. *If they can do it, I can too!*

Yes, it's Jesus we follow, not people. But other people rub off on you. (See 1 Cor. 11:1.) Hanging out with or observing others who are following Jesus with sincerity and integrity will impact your own ability to follow Him and give you courage when facing decisions about doing the right thing yourself.

2. Encourage you when you need help.

Life in this world is difficult. When you face tough stuff, others can stand beside you and help hold you up. Supporting one another is one of the core elements of the Christian faith. (See Eccl. 4:9-12, Acts 2:44-46.)

Some people see this as entitlement, expecting others to take care of their needs without putting in the effort to work and grow themselves. That's a distortion of this principle. But Jesus' plan for His body is that people help each other when the burdens are beyond their ability to carry (Gal. 6:2). Being close enough to other believers that they know what's going on in your life and support you with prayer and sometimes practical help when needed is priceless.

3. Hold you accountable to grow.

We can deceive ourselves quite easily. Those who are struggling to overcome an addiction such as alcohol or pornography almost universally find close personal connections absolutely essential to developing a life of sobriety and freedom. When there are people close to you, they can call you out on your lies, hold you accountable to follow through on your commitments and celebrate when you grow.

This kind of accountability must be filled with grace; it's

not micromanaging or condemning. But intentional mentoring relationships or long-term small groups can provide an environment for transformation that's more powerful than just about anything else.

4. Provide you a reason to grow.

Investing in spiritual growth for your own benefit would be good enough, but humanly speaking, that may sometimes become empty. Jesus did not only save you *from* something; He saved you *for* something. And that something always involves others in need in some way.

Working to bless others often brings you to the end of your own resources and presses you to rely on God more. You realize your influence has an impact on others. Like a parent realizing their child is watching and copying everything they do, those around you are getting an impression of who God is as a result of you. What is your impact on them?

What to Do Now

So what do you do if you are not involved in those kinds of personal relationships right now?

You're only isolated if you choose to be. That doesn't mean connecting with people is always easy or quick. You will need to invest intentional effort to make it happen. But it's so worth it.

Consider these steps.

1. **Pray for open eyes.** Ask God to show you the people you need to connect with, both those you can help and those who can help you.
2. **Call someone each day.** Every day, reach out to someone who needs you with a phone call, text message or other personal contact. Who do you know who needs a kind word of encouragement?

3. **Join a small group.** Whether you gather a few friends and acquaintances yourself or join a group through your church (or 12-step program and so on), just do it. These are the people you need to do life with.
4. **Elevate your friendships.** Look for one or a few people who are living the kind of life that inspires you, and watch them, talk with them, learn from them.

These steps sound simple, but many people struggle with them. I've struggled with them. But I promise that if you make these steps a habit, your personal connections will become significantly more meaningful in your own spiritual transformation.

Your Turn: *How would you grade your personal relationships? What are you going to do this week to begin stepping up the quality of your relationships? Leave a comment below.* {eo}

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