WHY WE NEED EACH OTHER

A few years ago, the press carried a heartrending story of a young father who shot himself in a tavern telephone booth. James Lee had called a Chicago newspaper and told a reporter he had sent the paper a manila envelope outlining his story. The reporter frantically tried to trace the call, but was too late. When the police arrived the young man was dead. In his pockets they found a child's crayon drawing. On it was written, "Please leave in my coat pocket. I want to have it buried with me." The drawing was signed by his daughter, Shirley Lee, who had perished in a fire just five months before. Lee was so grief-stricken he had asked total strangers to attend his daughter's funeral so she would have a nice service. He said there was no family to attend, since Shirley's mother had been dead since the child was two. Speaking to the reporter before his death, the heartbroken father said that all he had in life was gone and he felt so alone. He felt it better to be dead than live in an impersonal world. How many James Lees are there in this world? They don't wear signs saying "I'm lonely--will you help me?"

The biggest disease today is not leprosy or cancer. It's the feeling of being uncared for, unwanted - of being deserted and alone. -- Mother Teresa,

Today we start a series looking at community. What I want to talk to you about this morning is the exact opposite of what some of you have been taught most of your life. North Americans idolize independence. In America they have the Declaration of Independence. There are songs like Frank Sinatra’s “I did it my way,” They have heroes like the Lone Ranger. 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. 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.

Rom 12:5 so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.

We need each other. Community is not optional. You may feel you don’t need people and you are self sufficient but you are not. 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. Why do I need others?

1. I need others to WALK with me

Did you know that the Bible often compares the Christian life to a race? It is a journey. You don't just sit still in life. You’re not where you used to be and you’re not where you’re going to be. You’re on the move - on a journey.

Heb 12:1 Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.

One of the great truths of the Bible is that we were never meant to walk through life alone. This has nothing to do with whether you’re single or married. There are single people who are involved in deep, intimate, meaningful community. We also have married couples who are desperately lonely. Marriage does not solve the issue. Community does.
Some of you may be thinking “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.” You may like it but you need others to walk with you. Let me give you three reasons why:

a. It’s Safer

Walking through life with other people is safer. Have you ever had to walk through a dark alley at night in the inner city by yourself? It’s a little scary. Or a walk down a long road in the countryside by yourself. It can be scary. It’s safer to walk through life with others.

b. It’s Supportive

Walking with others keeps us from giving up. When you’re walking with other people you get the support and energy to keep on going that you wouldn’t have alone. Teams that play at home do better. That is called the home team advantage. That is because of the power of encouragement. There’s an old Zambian proverb that says, “When you run alone you run fast. But when you run together you run far.” Life is not a 50-yard dash. It is a marathon. If you want to make it to the end of life you need others to help you.

Canadian geese are able to fly great distances during their migration. They are able to do this because they fly together. They fly in formation with different geese taking the lead to share the burden of wind resistance. When one begins to slow the others honk to spur it on.

c. It’s Smarter

You learn more by walking with other people than you learn by walking alone.

Prov 28:26 He who trusts in himself is a fool, but he who walks in wisdom is kept safe.

Prov 11:14 Where no counsel is, the people fall: but in the multitude of counselors there is safety.

One of the things you learn by walking together is how to get along with other people. Learning to cooperate is important. Have you noticed when you walk with somebody else you have to change your step because everybody walks at a different pace. I have learned this walking with Naomi. I have much longer legs and tend to walk much faster. I have had to learn to slow down.

God told Adam in Gen 2:18 The LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him."

God created the perfect environment for Adam. The only thing that was not good was Adam’s isolation. It is not good for us to be alone. God hates loneliness. His antidote was to create 2 groups for us - physical family and a spiritual family. Your physical family is the one you grew up in. Your spiritual family is the one you have the rest of your life. It goes on into eternity.

Heb 10:25 Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another -- and all the more as you see the Day approaching

This church is your spiritual family, but just going to church is not true community. This is a crowd! You really cannot encourage people in a crowd. You can’t even get to know people in a deep way.
This is why we are talking about small groups. Have you ever felt lonely in a crowd? Community is God’s answer to loneliness.

1 Corinthians 14:26 When you gather each one of you be prepared with something useful for all. Sing a hymn, teach a lesson, tell a story, lead a prayer, provide an insight. Take your turn with no one person taking over. That way you all learn from each other. (The Message)

Does that sound like something we do here on Sunday morning? I don’t stand up here and say, “Anybody got a story to tell? What happened to you this week? Who has a prayer request? Who learned something from God this week? Who needs to be prayed for?” We’re too big to do that. This can only happen in a small group. That’s why to be a healthy believer you need large group worship and small group fellowship. The early church met both in the temple courts and also house to house. To learn community to need to be in community. Not a crowd but community. So that’s the first reason to get in a group. We need people to walk with us.

2. I need others to WORK with me

Eph 2:10 For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do

God has given each one of us different abilities and talents. This means our shape – our spiritual gifts, heart, abilities, passion and temperament. These things make up who we are and determine what role God wants us to play in the body of Christ. All of us are called to minister to others. One of the things we discussed in the 40 days of purpose is the fact that life on earth is practice for eternity. We learn to serve God in heaven by learning to serve him here on earth.

Often we want to serve but we are just too tired. Some of you came to church today exhausted. Sometimes the reason for this is that we have tried to do too much on our own.

Eccl 4:9 Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work:

Two people can get more done by working together than they can alone. This is the concept of synergy, that 2 people can do more together than the product of 2 people working alone. Give a person a fishing rod and he can catch a fish. Give 2 people a fishing rod and separately they can catch twice as many fish. Give them a net and together they can catch many more that separately.

Snowflakes are small and frail but if enough of them stick together they can stop traffic. Individually I can’t make that big of a difference in the world but together we can make a huge difference.

Community is God’s answer to fatigue. As Mennonites I am sure we have all seen a barn raising. Get enough people together and they can do amazing things.

3. I need others to WATCH OUT for me

All of us need people to watch out for us in life because we all have blind spots. We need others who will stand up for us, defend us and protect us.

Phil 2:4 Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.
I remember growing up in a neighborhood that had lots of Neighborhood Watch signs. That’s a sign of community. It tells criminals that we watch out for each other here. We’re looking out for each other. My guess is if you went on vacation this summer, you were gone for a few weeks. Maybe you asked someone you knew that you were going to be gone. You said, “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.

The real question is not who is watching your stuff but who is 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. If you don't have anybody like that, that’s sad.

If I came up here and my fly was unzipped I would hope someone would tell me and not let me go through the whole service that way. We need to watch out for each other because there’s some stuff we just can’t see.

Heb 13:1 Keep on loving each other as brothers.

The key word here is “keep.” That means not just once. You’re vigilant. In a war everybody has to take time on sentry duty. While everybody else is sleeping somebody stays awake and makes sure the enemy isn’t crashing in.

Eccl 4:10 If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up … 12 Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.

When I started scuba diving in high school the number one rule was that you never dive alone. There are just too many things that can go wrong when diving that it is crazy to do it by yourself.

Is there anybody watching your back? Who is watching out for your spiritual welfare? Are you in a small group you are accountable to? We all need a place where we can be honest with one another about our weaknesses. I have never yet met a single person who doesn’t have something in their life they’d like to change but have been unable to change. You’re never going to be able to change it on your own. If you could have, you would have already. You need other people because some problems in our life only get solved by tackling them together as a team. I need people to walk with me and work with me and watch out for me.

4. I need others to WAIT and WEEP with me

All of us will go through times of crisis in our lives. We need people with us in the inevitable crises of life so that when the tragedies hit we don’t have to face them alone. There are situations that nobody should ever have to go through alone. Nobody should ever have to wait alone in the hospital while a loved one is in a life and death surgery. No woman should ever have to go through the death of an unborn child alone. Nobody should have to stand at the edge of an open grave alone.

The fact is some of these things are going to happen to you. They’re inevitable. You’re going to have loved ones die and go through tragedy. At those times you need other people in your life.
Only a fool would go all the way through life totally unprepared for something that you know is inevitably going to happen to them.

What is God’s safety net? It is a group of other believers, people who are committed to you. Finding and developing those friendships is your responsibility. I have heard of people who come to church faithfully but never get involved. When crisis happens they wonder why no one responds as if it is the job of everyone around them to do all the work of building relationships. I have told you many times that you need to be in a small group. 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.

Rom 12:15 Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.

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. Somebody has a good thing a promotion or celebration, a graduation, we party. We have a good time. We have fun. Somebody has a tough time, we weep with them.

5. I need others to WITNESS with me

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 soldiers out by themselves. He says we go out together. What impresses the community the most? When Christians – believers – love each other.

John 13:34 "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. 35 By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

I’ve often asked you this question: Is anybody going to be in heaven because of you? Let me make you a little guarantee. If you will get in a small group for the next six weeks and you will take one of these invitations and you will invite somebody who doesn’t go to church to come and be in that small group and watch those videos that I’ve taped, together we’ll make this happen. By the end of 40 days you’ll be able to say, “Yes! Somebody’s in heaven because of me.”

We all need each other. We need other believers to walk with us, to work with us, to watch over us, to weep and wait with us and to witness with us. Say this, “I really, really, really need a group.” That is your declaration of interdependence.