

Social Fitness

We are glad you joined us to explore the importance of connections or the social arena of retirement. This is the third of six webinars. The Third/Third and NWD team conducted four surveys of licensed ministers, fifty and older, to identify their top interests. You were clear about these six topics: spiritual, mental/emotional, social, physical, financial, and timing.

Today we will make a presentation focusing on the third topic, social, looking at our relationships, then we will place you in a breakout group to discuss questions with a few other participants, and finally we will wrap up with shared discoveries and look at some recommended resources. Like the others, Ann and I will each lead various sessions.

The purpose of these webinars is to: *Equip ministers to be spiritually faithful emotionally healthy, socially connected, physically strong, and financially free. Free to be a steward of your gifts and callings without the need for role, remuneration, or reciprocation.*

We are Ann and Jared Roth. For 47 years we were Foursquare Church planters and pastors. We retired three years ago as co-lead pastors of Evergreen Christian Center in Hillsboro Oregon. We had a vision for the early years of retirement that we prepared for and have been enjoying. We are fellow adventurers with all of you, following Jesus through each season of life full of ideas, dreams, and desires, trusting Him in the twists and turns. We are so glad you have joined us today!

How important is it to invest time and energy in our relationships with other people?

VERY! Relationships play a crucial role in our well-being! Dr. Harvey Waldinger is the director of the longest longitudinal study done on well-being and health span. He asked the study participants that are now in their 80's to look back over their lives and share what they were proudest of. Almost everyone talked about their most important relationships.

Dr. Waldinger shares, "Once we had followed our participants all the way to age 80, we wanted to look back to age 50 and see what things at age 50 predicted who would be healthiest at age 80. And we found that it wasn't their cholesterol level or blood pressure at age 50 that predicted health at age 80. It was the quality of their relationships."

The research team did not even believe these results at first! They thought how could friendships or a romantic relationship affect what happens in our bodies? Studies of populations all over the world reinforced these findings.

Meaningful relationships affect our brains as well as our bodies. More socially connected people have less cognitive decline with age and if they do have mental decline it happens later than those who are more isolated and alone. Dr. Waldinger said their research

discovered that being isolated or lonely has an impact on the body of the equivalent of smoking a half pack of cigarettes a day! Meaningful connections matter!

Let's talk about pastors and consider the state of our social fitness: Pastors often find it difficult to make or sustain friendships while pastoring and may start retirement with a deficit. There are so many demands on pastors' time that it is hard to prioritize or sustain friendships and sometimes even to stay close to a spouse can be difficult. Family relationships may be strained if ministry is consistently prioritized over family.

Pastors often don't recognize how much the relationships they have outside of family are often related to their role and retirement affects those relationships. Aging all by itself, can be a challenge to staying connected. We know that loving relationships or connections impact our lives. Dr. Waldinger and his team were surprised to discover that good relationships keep us physically healthier and help us live longer!

Let's talk about a process that can help you move forward, wherever you happen to be on the meaningful-relationships spectrum:

1. Assess the current relationships that you have. (Introduce the *Relationship inventory Tool link in the chat*) This tool asks you to assess your relationships on fourteen qualities that make them meaningful for you.

2. Respond to the reflection questions in the tool and identify where you need to grow.

One of the reflections as I considered my relationships across the seasons of my life is that when I was in mid-life stage, I thought ministry was more important than it was. This meant that I hurried my kids and did not always take the time to "read between the lines" in our conversations. Fortunately, I right sized my allocation of time to ministry as I turned 50. When I was giving ministry more time than I should it also affected my friendships. I allowed several good friendships to go untended during my midlife stage.

3. Tips for expanding your social network to meet your needs and minimize the risk of loneliness and social isolation.

- a. Stay in touch with friends and family with or without reciprocation initially. We have more options for this than ever, yet loneliness is epidemic. Don't wait for the text or phone call—you initiate. Systematize your connections. Put it in your calendar! Story: Siblings – Friends

- b. Invite someone to do something with you that you currently do alone. Eg. working out, walking, enjoying a sport or hobby.

- c. Be aware of Social Forecasting when you consider initiating with a new person and courageously move ahead! Social forecasting is the thing we all do when we think of

initiating conversation or an invitation with a new person. Our thoughts immediately go to the negative –well almost! 80% of the time these thoughts are negative! “They would not want to talk with me. They will think I am weird. They probably don’t want to do this activity”...and so on. This negative thinking is unfounded most of the time so move ahead and initiate!

d. Do something you care about with someone else or several others. Eg. Join a serve team, pickle ball, meals on wheels, gardening and more.

What about your most important relationships? Your relationship with your spouse: Explore both of your needs, expectations, thoughts and feelings about aspects of life impacting you as a couple as you move toward retirement or in this phase of retirement.

Your relationship with your living parent/s: I almost forgot to include this one because my mom has lived with us for 28 years and my dad and Jared’s parents are gone. We were very involved with them while they were living. What do you parents need or want from you at this stage of their life? With my mom who is 96 years old, our mantra has been to let her do as much she can for as long as she can.

What about your relationship with your kids/ adult children? Reflect on your best hopes and worst fears about relationships with your adult children and define your optimal parenting role: Are you in the role of coach or peer?

What about your grandparenting role? Reflect on your best hopes and worst fears about relationships with your grandchildren and define your best fit grandparenting role. We have friends who are raising a grandchild in retirement with love and joy. This was necessary for the wellbeing of this little girl. Our stories are each different.

Jared and I let our kids know. Our role is to love and celebrate our grands. We will support your training, but we are not their trainers. Story: Grands Camp.

Now for our favorite part of this session! You will be moved into random breakout groups to discuss some social fitness questions that will help you prepare for your preferred future! These questions will appear in the chat room for a brief time so please take a screen shot or photo, so you have them. You will have 30 minutes to share together on this topic.

Breakout Questions:

- 1. How much “my time” and “my space” do I need?*
- 2. How would I like us to spend time together, as a couple?*
- 3. How would you describe your relationships with your adult children and/or grandchildren in this season? What could you do to make the relationship even more meaningful?*
- 4. What is one step you could take to improve your social fitness?*

Share an insight from your discussion that addresses one of these questions.

Resources: The Development Lattice on NWD website is a warehouse of high value resources. In the “future planning” section you will find several featured suggestions. A link at the end of that sampler list is a document with 50 resources curated specifically for these webinars.

Among others we suggest:

1. *The Good Life: Lessons from the World's Longest Scientific Study of Happiness* by Robert Waldinger and Marc Schulz, 2022.

2. *The Happiness Curve: Why Life Gets Better After 50* by Jonathan Rauch, 2018.

3. *Keys to a Successful Retirement: Staying Happy, Active, and Productive in Your Retired Years* by Fritz Gilbert, 2020.

4. *Mattering: The Secret to a Life of Deep Connections and Purpose* by Jennifer Breheny Wallace, 2026