

“Loneliness is a Health Hazard” San Marino Tribune, May 6, 2018
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In the story of creation God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone.” We are made for relationships, with God and with one another. We are to “love God and love our neighbors.” But apparently there is a qualitative difference in our relationships today that leads to a kind of isolation in the midst of plenty.

An article in *The New York Times* entitled “Loneliness is a Health Hazard, But There Are Remedies,” claims that “Social isolation is a growing epidemic - one that’s increasingly recognized as having dire physical, mental and emotional consequences. Since the 1980’s loneliness has doubled from 20 to 40 percent. People with less social connection have disrupted sleep patterns, altered immune systems, more inflammation and higher levels of stress hormones. One recent study found that isolation increases the risk of heart disease by 29 percent and stroke by 32 percent. About one-third of Americans older than 65 live alone; half of those over 85 do.” I’m left wondering why more people don’t share life together in their local community church?

And all of these changes in mental and physical health are occurring just as new forms of social networking have become available. Why? Perhaps one contributing factor to this loneliness is that we have replaced committed, covenantal relationships with transactional, utilitarian relationships. A lecturer at Princeton Theological Seminary says, “We have to be more communal in an age that is too individualistic. We have to be more emotional in a culture that is too cerebral.” It does seem to me that people know only enough about us in order to perform some limited function or duty like shopping or gardening or appliance repair. Even doctors and nurses focus their time with patients narrowly upon the present problem. Rarely does the conversation lead into matters that may actually hold the key for understanding what’s wrong.

When our relationships in the community of faith become merely transactional, utilitarian relationships too, it is no wonder that people walk away. Many are searching for a place that will provide more authenticity and meaning but I become concerned that many bounce from church to church looking for some form of entertainment, rather than forming relationships with other people. The Church that offers more than time of worshiping together, is one that provides real covenantal friendships. But you have to be willing to look for it, and give it time. Church communities are like real life families having to work things out. We build, support, share, listen, teach and repair with each other’s gifts and talents. And with time, there is a connection, and a dedication to living together all the way to the end of life, when we fulfill our baptismal vows to carry one another to our final resting places.

“Human connection lies at the heart of human well-being,” concludes *The New York Times* article. Genesis made the same point a few thousand years earlier. So attend

a church more often this year and get involved. Your own well-being could depend on it. And invite someone else to join you. Most people surveyed indicate they would attend services if invited by someone they know. You never know how healing it may be for both of you, and the rest of us too.