

Birds of a Feather

Our Need for a Flock

October 22, 2023

Today I want to share my story and my heart.

But first here's a question: **What did God deem 'not good' in the creation story?**



It is not good for man to be *alone!* – Genesis 2:18 NIV



Now, I believe *God* brought me here, but my journey has been anything but easy and simple. It has been full of highs and lows. And I spent my fair share of time in the belly of a whale (like our man Jonah), running from God's intentions.



So I'm not here today because I had some big revelation from God or lightning from heaven. Being a pastor was not on my radar. No, God slowly but surely carried me along all the while gently whispering *His* plans. I am here today because **God never gave up on me** ... nor will He ever give up on you! *Amen?*



In their hearts humans plan their course, but the Lord establishes their steps. - Proverbs 16:9 NIV

15 years ago, I had a very pivotal season in my life. I had the opportunity to lead a men's life group. There were 8-10 of us youngish men from different walks of life.

We had everything from a teacher, to a Snohomish County Sheriff, to 4 out of 5 members of a rock band – a real rock band (they were on "Tooth and Nail" records!). They had long, cool, hair, tight rocker jeans, and one of them, in the middle of our study was constantly trying to take a "smoke break." That's when you know you're in an "cool or edgy life group", rockers taking smoke breaks in the middle of prayer!

And it was one of the most memorable seasons of my life. We sat together, ate together, read together and prayed together. And as I sat with these guys week after week, month after month, something amazing happened; **I began to witness the power of Jesus at work!**

Slowly but surely, WE all became different men, and I wondered, "*what kept us coming back each week?*" We all had lives to live, surely, we could've find something more "exciting" to do, so – why would each of us take the time out of our busy calendars each week? The answer is simple... **we came back for each other!**

And isn't that a big part of why we put pants on, on Sunday morning and come to church?

Many of you stand around before or after church talking, sharing, and connecting. Cuz long after forgetting what the message was about or what songs we sang, we will remember the interactions. A word of encouragement from our friends, or maybe a hug when we needed it most!



Now, some of you hermits might say “*well, all I need is Jesus, I don’t need people, I’m here for Jesus!*”! Yes, but even hermits need friends! So, if we all nod our heads, and recognize that people and relationships really are important, how do we lose sight of that?



Well, **we’re constantly tempted by “relational substitutes”** We reach for many things of this life that we think will provide fulfillment, but they never do! Or at least, never last. We might try work, money, technology, or any other “shiny” thing – but none of ‘em will ever satisfy God’s intentions! We can try time and time again to find a relational *substitute*, but **God hard wired us with a deep need for human connection!**



If we go back to the creation story in the Bible, God created animals then He created man; Adam. And Adam was the only human in the garden. For a while, it was God, Adam, and the living creatures. And something wasn’t right! Before Eve, just consider the companions Adam might have encountered in the garden. Not only is the sloth not a great looker, but not a great helper. It takes a sloth about 3 days to get five minutes’ worth of chores. Just ask my wife!



And all throughout the creation story, God saw everything He made (land, sea, sun, moon, animals) and put His stamp of approval on it. That is what the Bible says:

God saw all that He had made, and it was very good.. - Genesis 1:31 NIV

God looked at what He’d made, and it was good. In fact, God said it was, ‘very good.’ However, God saw Adam’s heart, and knowing him inside and out, He saw there was something missing.

For Adam no suitable helper was found. - Genesis 2:20 NIV

[And that’s why] It is not good for man to be *alone!* – Genesis 2:18 NIV

So as a result God made a companion, a helper; woman. Cuz **everybody needs somebody.**

This last Spring, our friends and neighbors Kevin and Sarah, came home with 6 brand new baby chicks. Well actually, 4 roosters and 2 hens. And they ended up getting rid of 3 of the roosters and both hens. Leaving them with 1 rooster, Dandelion. And what I began to hear from Dandelion was this very interesting crow; like slowly let the air out of a balloon. Two weeks ago, I was outside, I heard this depressed, halfhearted crow! At first, I was sad and a little concerned, but then I got excited – there it is! A sermon illustration! It’s the lonely rooster!

This whole week I practiced this sickly, depressed rooster call and after I debated trying to do it out loud, Noah and Bruce talked me into at least giving it a shot! So here we go... errrrhhh.....



If God created roosters to need a community, how much more do we need that same thing! Here is my point, **you need a flock!**



One of the most amazing relationship stories in the Old Testament is the story of Ruth, the daughter-in-law of Naomi. It is a story of loss, loneliness, amazing friendship, and ultimately, God's redemption! Naomi was an older, God fearing, Jewish woman from Bethlehem living in a foreign land. She was a seemingly blessed wife, and mother of two sons. Naomi's husband dies and leaves her as a widow. Enter a young woman named Ruth. Ruth marries one of Naomis sons but after several years, he dies – and then the other son dies.

Now, we've got two widows – one young and one old. And as you can imagine, life has not turned out as they had expected. With no husband, and no sons, Naomi packs her bags and sets out to return home to Bethlehem; along the way she tries to convince Ruth that they should go their separate ways. Naomi tries to convince Ruth she's got lots of life to live and is still young enough to find an eligible bachelor; she's saying *"You stay here and start a new life... I am an old woman; there is nothing for you with me!"* But just listen to what Ruth says to Naomi after Naomi tries to talk her into splitting up:

Ruth said "Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord deal with me, be it ever so severely, if even death separates you and me." When Naomi realized that Ruth was determined to go with her, she stopped urging her. - Ruth 1:16-18



If you have lived any length of time on this earth, you know **loneliness is inevitable in this life**, and can happen for any number of reasons. It could come from a loved one's loss of life like Ruth and Naomi, loss of relationships, or loss of what you thought life might look like! Regardless, I found a recent study that said 52% of American adults report themselves as feeling lonely.

36% of adults say they feel lonely not just occasionally, but all the time.

Loneliness is such a problem, that the UK and Japan have both appointed a position called the "Minister of Loneliness." This person's sole responsibility is to tackle the loneliness epidemic by connecting people, creating small groups, and organizing events. And this is not coming from the church; this is coming from the government! And if the government admits a people problem – then we know there's a problem.

Loneliness can be experienced in the middle of busyness or what we call "normal life".

We can be involved in good things like meaningful work, family activities, or hobbies – and we can know a lot of people, have a lot of so-called friends, and come here on Sunday morning – but still feel deep loneliness.



But here is the difference- while loneliness is a part of living in a broken world, **God's intention is that we would not choose loneliness.** Choosing loneliness means somewhere along the way we have put up barriers on our hearts. It is when we say relationships are too hard, too time-consuming, too much of a sacrifice, that **we walk away from God's intentions.**

Whenever you walk out your front door there's going to be a cost: there can be hurt, pain, things said, misunderstandings; things which make us wonder if it isn't easier to stay home in the lazy boy, with the blinds shut, and the TV on.

A breakdown in any relationship can happen when we feel like our needs are not being met. When my spouse stops meeting my needs, it's easy to stop trying; **if we ever come to church and ask, what's in it for me, we've got it all wrong.**

Each of us needs a friend like Ruth; but more importantly; **we need to be a friend like Ruth to others.** One that says I am loyal, faithful to you despite what is or isn't in it, for me.

The story of Ruth and Naomi doesn't just end with the two of them walking off into the sunset together; God used Ruth's amazing faith and sacrifice and is still using it today. Ruth was the great-grandmother of King David; and Matthew includes Ruth in Jesus' family tree.

It was because of her decision, to sacrifice her own comfort and security that her story of loss and loneliness became a story where she found a new family, God's family.

And that's why I'm excited to be a part of this family.

Simply put, I get to be a part of your lives.

Cuz after all, It's not good for us to be alone. Amen?