

MESSAGE BIG IDEA

Because God is relational, we are relational. We are not wired for isolation but sent into the world to cultivate relationships.

SCRIPTURE

Genesis 1:26-27, Genesis 2:18, Philippians 2:1-11, Galatians 6:2

ICEBREAKER & OPENING THOUGHT

1. Whether you have a little or a lot, what is your favorite way to spend your alone time?
2. We desire meaningful relationships with God and each other. Deep down, we all want connection. Even the most introverted person recognizes the need for community. How does connecting with those around you look in your own life?

BIBLE DISCUSSION

3. Read Genesis 1:26-27, 2:18. What do you notice about God and His creation?
4. Read Philippians 2:1-11. What does this say about the very nature of God? How do we reconcile our personal ambitions with looking to the best interests of others?
5. Read Galatians 6:2. What are some ways we can carry each other's burdens?

LIFE APPLICATION

6. According to a survey from January 2020 conducted by Cigna Health, three in five adults reported being lonely. That number was 23 million people more than just two years ago in 2018. Loneliness was a problem before COVID-19! With social distancing measures in place, the number of adults feeling lonely or isolated is even greater still. So, if it was a serious problem before, getting back to a "normal" way of life isn't the solution. What has changed about your life and relationships due to the pandemic?
7. Are there any changes you've been forced to change that you want to be permanent changes?
8. Susan Pinker, a psychologist and author of "The Village Effect," said that loneliness is a subjective feeling of being alone against your will. That means you can be alone and not be lonely, or you can be surrounded by people and still feel alone. Do you find yourself feeling more alone or lonely as social distancing drags on?

CHALLENGE

So, Coronavirus isn't the only factor to feeling lonely, but it has accentuated our desire not to be alone. You probably have experienced something similar. And if we are having these feelings, it is a safe bet that people in our communities feel it too. What are some ways we can continue to live in community and BLESS one another right now?

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BIBLE DISCUSSION

- Genesis 1:26-27, 2:18. God was not alone in creation, nor did he create us to be alone.
- Philippians 2:1-11. We are not without our own drives and desires in life. What stands out is the parameters inside which we can achieve them, requiring humility, honesty, and thoughtful regard for others.
- Galatians 6:2. "Bear one another's burdens". We carry other burdens, and sometimes we go through seasons where those burdens are too much for us. Such burdens might include relationship issues, financial problems, illness, indecision, or emotional difficulties. God's Spirit certainly gives us the power to deal with these issues, but another way God intends to provide for those in Christ is by giving us the ability to help each other.
- Christian community is important for our happiness and growth; it's not an optional part of the Christian life. When we are in close relationships with other believers, we have people to pray for us, support us, encourage us, exhort us, and serve alongside us.
- Wherever you are, maybe the first challenge is to pray and ask God to bring to mind some people you need to bless. It could be someone you've known for a long time, or it could be someone new. Another way you can step up to bless your community is by hosting a Watch Party. These are straightforward ways to engage with your neighbors. Just go to communitychristian.org/watch to learn more about how you can host one this next weekend!
- In this time of distancing and disconnection, what would it look like if we intentionally lived out this invitation of community? What would change if we didn't settle for isolation and instead, strove for deep, meaningful connection? Christianity is, by definition, community. We need one another to live out the way of Jesus.

CHALLENGE

One of the main ways we live this out is through what we call the BLESS practices, which are all about relationships and connecting with one another. It's an acronym that helps us love others and bridge the gap between isolation and connection. In these odd times, we need to get extra creative to live these out because our world needs it. Here's how it works:

B - BEGIN WITH PRAYER

This is always where we start. And in quarantine, we can continue to pray for our neighbors. You are encouraged to go to BlessEveryHome.com. It lists your neighbor's names and addresses with helpful ideas for how you can pray for them. You can go on a prayer walk through your neighborhood as long as you wear a mask and maintain social-distancing guidelines. As you do, ask God to bless the people you see or the apartment buildings and homes as you walk through your community. The next letter is:

L- LISTEN

Again, as long as we keep our distance, we can still talk to people when we are out and about. If you aren't comfortable leaving your home or if you are a high-risk individual, you might try Face Time, Zoom, or Google Hangout with friends, neighbors, and co-workers. Try asking them, "How are you really doing?" and then give them the space to actually tell you. More than ever, in this season of isolation, people are longing for connection - someone who will LISTEN to them. Next:

E - EAT

This looks different now than it did a year ago. But we can offer to provide a meal via a food delivery app. Or better yet, don't ask first, surprise someone. Buy extra or a delicious "treat" at the grocery store and drop it off for someone. Schedule a Zoom lunch or dinner together. A recent story tells of a couple from our church leaving some freshly baked scones on their neighbor's porch. How can we bless our community through food? The next letter is:

S - SERVE

Social distancing means we have to get creative in how we serve others. Write a thank-you note to your local grocer or first responders, etc. Share supplies with your neighbors (some are still difficult to find). Call someone who may be lonely, buy groceries for someone who can't leave their home. There are tons of ways we can serve one another during this time. And the last letter is:

S - STORY

In this crisis, we may have more opportunities than ever to tell our story - the story of how we found our way back to God and the difference our hope in Jesus makes, especially during these difficult times. Look for the opportunity to share your story. And keep it simple. It's as easy as one, two, three. 1) Your life before you met Jesus. 2) How you met Jesus. And 3) Your life since you met Jesus.

Quote to consider:

"A Christian fellowship lives and exists by the intercession of its members for one another, or it collapses. I can no longer condemn or hate a brother for whom I pray, no matter how much trouble he causes me. His face, that hitherto may have been strange and intolerable to me, is transformed in intercession into the countenance of a brother for whom Christ died, the face of a forgiven sinner." ~ Dietrich Bonhoeffer