

We Need Each Other

I recently read a New York Times article from April 2022 entitled: *How Loneliness Is Damaging Our Health*. The article chronicles several peoples' experiences with loneliness particularly in terms of how the pandemic affected them. Along with these stories the article looks at some of the research on loneliness and the negative consequences of not being connected to others. Here's a short excerpt:

Even before the pandemic, the United States surgeon general, Vivek Murthy, said the country was experiencing an "epidemic of loneliness," driven by the accelerated pace of life and the spread of technology into all of our social interactions. With this acceleration, he said, efficiency and convenience have "edged out" the time-consuming messiness of real relationships.

The result is a public health crisis on the scale of the opioid epidemic or obesity, Dr. Murthy said. In a 2018 study by the Kaiser Family Foundation, one in five Americans said they always or often felt lonely or socially isolated. The pandemic only exacerbated these feelings. . .

. . . "Loneliness," Dr. Murthy said, "has real consequences to our health and well-being." Being lonely, like other forms of stress, increases the risk of emotional disorders like depression, anxiety and substance abuse. Less obviously, it also puts people at greater risk of physical ailments that seem unrelated, like heart disease, cancer, stroke, hypertension, dementia and premature death.

Loneliness has real consequences to our health and our well-being. Of course it does! We are created for relationship! We need each other. This truth is all over the Scriptures. We are created in the image of a Triune God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, who dwell in a community of love and oneness. When God created Adam, he said that it was not good for him to be alone (Gen. 2:18) and so he created Eve that Adam and Eve could share companionship as husband and wife. We are not made to dwell alone. We need each other!

In the spiritual realm, the same thing is true. We need each other. We need each other to be spiritually healthy and to grow. Here's how Gordon McDonald articulates how important community is in his book, *A Resilient Life*:

The faith taught to so many of us is a faith of individualism. It centers heavily on the transaction between Jesus and me. It rarely focuses on the idea of Jesus and us. It was some of my Asian Christian friends who began to convince me that there was an entirely different way to understand the Bible: through the lens of community, God doing His work in our lives through one another. In other words, I cannot grow into what God wants me to be (and do) unless I am in tight formation with some others (*A Resilient Life*, 212-13).

MacDonald is absolutely right when he says that we cannot be and we cannot do what God wants for us if we are not “in tight formation with some others.” God does much of His work in our lives through our relationships with each other. There are so many things that we need from God to grow spiritually, but in many cases, God doesn’t give those things directly; rather He gives us these things through His people.

The “One Others” of Healthy Spiritual Community

One of the ways to see how God works in us and through us in healthy spiritual community is through something that has been called the “one others” of Scripture. The phrase, “one another,” is a translation of a Greek pronoun, that has the idea of reciprocal action. This pronoun is used over 50 to address how we are to relate to each other in the body of Christ. When we are in a healthy spiritual community, we experience the “one others” of Scripture. And when that’s happening, we are in a place where we can grow and thrive spiritually.

This morning we are going to look at five of these. If you want a complete list, I will include a list at the end of my manuscript, which will be posted with my sermon on our website this week. My hope is that in looking at just these five, we would be more convinced that we need to be connecting with others in the body of Christ if we are going to be disciples of Jesus who are growing.

And so first the first “one another” that we will look at is that, **we are to love one another**. This is one of the most repeated “one others.” In John 13:34 Jesus says:

³⁴ I am giving you a new commandment, that you love one another; just as I have loved you, that you also love one another. ³⁵ By this all people will know that you are My disciples: if you have love for one another.”

It is interesting that Jesus calls this a *new command*, because there were commands in the Old Testament to love one’s neighbor (e.g., Lev. 19:18). What makes this new is that Jesus intensifies the command to love. We are to love AS Jesus has loved. And the way Jesus loved us was by laying down his life (1 John 3:16). We are called to love each other, as Jesus did, in this sacrificial way, at great personal cost at times, for each other’s good.

Here’s a second “one another.” **We are to motivate one another to a life of love and good deeds**. Hebrews 10 says:

²⁴ And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, ²⁵ not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

When we live in community with others, we can *stir up one another to love and of good works*. *Stir up* is a strong word. It has the sense of provoking someone. It means we cause someone to do what is loving and to do good works.

We are to *consider* how we might do this. We are to give careful thought to this. This is only possible if we are in community. We must be in relationship with others in such a way that it is possible to get to know them so that we can discern how to motivate each other to love and good deeds.

The author points out that the only way we can do this is as we *meet together*. It is in the gathering in a consistent way that we get to know each other well enough that we can have this ministry in each other's lives. In the context of Hebrews this stirring up of each other is in the context of remaining faithful in one's walk with Jesus. They were experiencing real dangers tempting them to turn from faithfulness to Jesus. And so, he urges them to not to neglect gathering together. The stakes were so high.

And you know what? The stakes are high for us as well. If we neglect meeting together, we are more vulnerable to our hearts growing cold and turning from faithfulness to Jesus. Who are you spurring on? Who spurs you on to a life of love and good works? Are you meeting in ways with other believers so that this can actually happen? I know this is hard. There are a lot of challenges to meeting together. This involves the "time-consuming messiness of real relationships" that Vivek Murthy talked about in that article I mentioned. But the value is too great to miss this. We need to be spurring one another on to lives of love and good deeds. We need each other.

Cindy and I have been married for 36 years and in all these years it has been our committed practice to meet with other believers in small groups for spiritual purposes. Even when I was in seminary, during some of the busiest years of our lives, we continued to gather with others. It wasn't easy. We had four young kids. There was the cost of hiring a sitter. The demands of seminary were high. But we kept meeting with others because it was important, and we continue to do so today.

Third: **We are to encourage one another.** We find this in Hebrews 10 that we just looked at but let me read another one. Hebrews 3:13 says:

¹³ But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

In 10:25 it is translated, *encourage*. Here it is *exhort*. This word can have the sense of comforting and consoling someone to a stronger kind of urging or exhorting to action. When we encourage one another, it is with the view of helping another person live a certain way.

The author of Hebrews says that this ministry of encouragement is to be done *every day*. It is to be a regular thing, which again suggests that we need to have some people in our lives with whom we are living in close relationship if this is going to happen.

We need this kind of encouragement from others so that we may not be *hardened by the deceitfulness of sin*. Again, in the context of Hebrews, he is talking about turning away from following Jesus. Sometimes we need encouragement from God to continue in this battle. And God wants to encourage us, but so often His encouragement comes in the form of another person.

I've mentioned this before. I have a friend that I meet for lunch a couple of times a month. I've met with him for over 20 years. He is someone who encourages me regularly and I do the same for him. Sometimes his encouragement is in the form of comfort. Sometimes it is in the form of exhorting me to action – to do the right thing when I'm wavering. His encouragement calls me up to what God wants for me and I try to do the same for him. God uses this relationship to encourage me.

Who encourages you in your walk with God? Who comforts you; who exhorts you? Who calls you out on your sin? And who are you doing these things for? We need each other.

Fourth: **We are to spiritually build up one another.** Romans 14:19 says:

¹⁹ So then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding.

The ESV translates “one another” as *mutual* here, which makes very plain the reciprocal nature of this activity. We are to mutually build up each other. *Upbuilding* has the sense of edifying or building up others in their spiritual growth. Paul says that we are to *pursue* this. We don't just hope this happens. No, we are to have an intentionality in seeking to build up one another spiritually.

How do we do this? Certainly, the words that we speak to one another are part of this. We build up as we speak words of grace and truth to each other (Eph. 4:15). We build up when we extend forgiveness to another when it is needed. We build up when we express grace and acceptance in the way that God would express it. All of this builds up other believers.

The Scriptures also talk about how God has given every believer a spiritual gift – it might be the gift of teaching or leading, or the gift of hospitality or mercy; it might be the gift of giving or encouragement or any number of other gifts. Paul says in Ephesians 4 that as each person uses his or her gift properly the body builds itself up (Eph. 4:16).

Are you experiencing the kind of community where there are others who are seeking to build you up? And are you living in community in a way where God is using you to build up others? Much of what God wants to do in your life to build you up is going to happen through other people. We are created for community. We need each other.

Finally: **We are to bear one another's burdens.** Galatians 6:1-2 says:

¹ Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. ² Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.

Verse 1 gives instructions for how the body of Christ is to deal with a person who is caught up in sin. Spiritually minded people are to seek to *restore* such a person with a *spirit of gentleness*. And then it says that we are to *bear one another's burdens*.

Burdens literally means "weight." In the New Testament it is often used figuratively for an oppressive burden. In the context here it probably refers to the burdens of sin that verse one speaks of, but there is certainly a broader application. We are to help bear any kind of oppressive burden that other believers find themselves under.

In this room there are all kinds of burdens that people are carrying. It might be the burden of some kind of sin that one is trapped in like Paul talks about here. It might be some kind of deep sadness, or shame, or anxiety, or depression. It might be facing an uncertain future. It might be some kind of loss. Paul says we are not to bear these burdens alone, but rather, we are to mutually bear one another's burdens.

Sometimes the burdens we are under can become so great that they cause us to lose hope, but when we have a few others that are bearing our burdens with us, we can find the strength and faith to keep moving forward. And these times then can become times of significant growth. Who is helping you bear your burdens? And who do you help? We need each other.

These are just five of the many "one anothers," but hopefully this is enough to help you get the picture that we need each other. Hopefully, it helps you see that much of what God wants to do in our lives He does through others in the body of Christ. If you are seeking to walk as a growing, healthy disciple of Jesus, you must be in community with others in the body of Christ where the "one anothers" are happening.

Application: As we come to the end of our time, I want to offer a couple of thoughts on application. The first is this: **Reject the lie that growing in your faith is something that you do alone.** I mentioned Gordon McDonald's comment earlier that so many of us are taught a faith of individualism. We live in a culture that values individualism. We are influenced by this kind of thinking. In our culture, we tend to think we've arrived when we are self-sufficient, when we don't need anybody. But this just isn't biblical. It is a cultural lie. We need each other. We need others to grow. God has designed it this way. And so, reject the lie that says that you don't need others to grow.

Secondly, I would encourage you to do some self-reflection and ask yourself if you are truly in community? Ask yourself if you're experiencing spiritual community with other believers such that the "one anothers" are happening? I know that some of you would say yes. You are experiencing the "one anothers." You are thriving in community. If so, press on. But if your answer is no, then let me encourage you to **find ways to connect in community.** Begin praying and asking God to help you find community.

For some, connecting in community may mean that as much as you've loved the comfort of just staying home and watching services online, that you need to begin showing up. You need to make the choice to move towards gathering with other believers. But here's the thing, even if you are showing up to our Sunday gatherings, if this is the extent of your gathering with other believers you are still missing out on the kind of community that you need to grow. We hope the "one anothers" happen as we gather here on Sundays, but there is something about gathering regularly with a smaller group of believers that allows you to go deeper in the encouragement,

the burden-bearing, and the building up, and all that God wants to do in and through us through community. And so find ways to connect in deeper community.

Find ways to connect in deeper community because you need it. Find ways to connect in community because others need it. This isn't just about what you need; this is also about what you need to offer to others to help them grow. The "one anothers" is about reciprocal ministry to each other.

One of the main ways we seek to help facilitate this kind of connection is our group ministry. If you are not connected in community, let me encourage you to consider joining one of our groups this semester. Our groups can be a great place to get a little closer to at least a few people and in that context be able to live out the "one anothers."

Rooted, which is a 11-week discipleship experience, is a great way to get connected to a group here at Faith. Rooted will start on Jan. 30th (Monday nights). Registration is now open for that. Next week, we will also make available all of the other group opportunities and so make sure you check those out.

In encouraging you to sign up for a group, I want to acknowledge a tension. I realize that we may not have a group that works for you right now. The days and times may not work out for you. If that is the case, I would still encourage you to get in touch with me and let me know of your desire to get connected and we will see if we can figure something out.

I also want to make it clear what I'm NOT saying. I'm not saying that unless you are in one of Faith's official groups you are missing out on community. You may have a group of friends that you've developed over the years with whom you are living out the "one anothers." If so, that is what matters. The goal is not to have everyone in one of our groups. The goal is that we are all in spiritual community with people who help us grow.

I mentioned earlier that some of you are experiencing community. For those for whom that is true, I have a question that I would love for you to consider. Is there any way you can offer what you are experiencing to others? Maybe it is inviting someone into your group or into your circle of friends. Maybe it is choosing to open your up home to someone new. Maybe it is inviting someone over for a meal. I think it reflects the heart of Jesus when we develop this heart to include new people in the community that we are experiencing. Find way to connect to community. Find ways to help others connect to community because we need each other.

Bible Word Study – ἀλλήλων (allēlōn)

Greek: ἀλλήλων (allēlōn) one another; of one another

[IGEL](#) of one another; to one another; one another

[CDWGTB](#) one another; each other; mutual; (the other); (them-, your-) selves; (selves) together; sometimes with

[LSJ](#) of one another, to one another, one another; mutually, reciprocally; one another; reciprocal

Found 100 times in the New Testament

Over 50 of the uses relate to how we are to function as a church:

1. [Mark 9:50](#) Salt is good, but if the salt has lost its saltiness, how will you make it salty again? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another.”
2. [John 13: 34](#) A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.
3. [John 13:35](#) By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”
4. [John 15:12](#) “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.
5. [John 15:17](#) These things I command you, so that you will love one another.
6. [Romans 1:12](#) that is, that we may be mutually encouraged by each other’s faith, both yours and mine.
7. [Romans 12:5](#) so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.
8. [Romans 12:10](#) Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor.
9. [Romans 12:10](#) Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor.
10. [Romans 12:16](#) Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight.
11. [Romans 13:8](#) Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law.
12. [Romans 14:13](#) Therefore let us not pass judgment on one another any longer, but rather decide never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother.
13. [Romans 15:5](#) May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus,
14. [Romans 15:7](#) Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.
15. [Romans 15:14](#) I myself am satisfied about you, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able to instruct one another.
16. [Romans 16:16](#) Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ greet you.
17. [1 Corinthians 11:33](#) So then, my brothers, when you come together to eat, wait for one another—
18. [1 Corinthians 12:25](#) that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another.

19. [1 Corinthians 16:20](#) All the brothers send you greetings. Greet one another with a holy kiss.
20. [2 Corinthians 13:12](#) Greet one another with a holy kiss.
21. [Galatians 5:13](#) For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.
22. [Galatians 5:15](#) But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another.
23. [Galatians 5:15](#) But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another.
24. [Galatians 5:26](#) Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.
25. [Galatians 5:26](#) Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.
26. [Galatians 6:2](#) Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.
27. [Ephesians 4:2](#) with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love,
28. [Ephesians 4:25](#) Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another.
29. [Ephesians 4:32](#) Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.
30. [Ephesians 5:21](#) submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.
31. [Philippians 2:3](#) Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.
32. [Colossians 3:9](#) Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices
33. [Colossians 3:13](#) bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.
34. [1 Thessalonians 3:12](#) and may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, as we do for you,
35. [1 Thessalonians 4:9](#) Now concerning brotherly love you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another,
36. [1 Thessalonians 4:18](#) Therefore encourage one another with these words.
37. [1 Thessalonians 5:11](#) Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.
38. [1 Thessalonians 5:15](#) See that no one repays anyone evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to everyone.
39. [2 Thessalonians 1:3](#) We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers, as is right, because your faith is growing abundantly, and the love of every one of you for one another is increasing.
40. [Hebrews 10:24](#) And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works,
41. [James 4:11](#) Do not speak evil against one another, brothers. The one who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, speaks evil against the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge.

42. [James 5:9](#) Do not grumble against one another, brothers, so that you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing at the door.
43. [James 5:16](#) Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.
44. [James 5:16](#) Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.
45. [1 Peter 1:22](#) Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart,
46. [1 Peter 4:9](#) Show hospitality to one another without grumbling.
47. [1 Peter 5:5](#) Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.”
48. [1 Peter 5:14](#) Greet one another with the kiss of love. Peace to all of you who are in Christ.
49. [1 John 1:7](#) But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.
50. [1 John 3:11](#) For this is the message that you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another.
51. [1 John 3:23](#) And this is his commandment, that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us.
52. [1 John 4:7](#) Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God.
53. [1 John 4:11](#) Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.
54. [1 John 4:12](#) No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.
55. [2 John 5](#) And now I ask you, dear lady— not as though I were writing you a new commandment, but the one we have had from the beginning— that we love one another.
56. [Revelation 6:4](#) And out came another horse, bright red. Its rider was permitted to take peace from the earth, so that people should slay one another, and he was given a great sword.