

“It’s Not Good to Be Alone”

Series: Making Relationships Work: Love, Sex & Marriage
September 10, 2017 – Brad Bailey

Intro

I want to invite us to imagine the massive nature of the creation of all things. God provides us with a poetic summary in the first Book in the Bible...Genesis. It declares how the physical universe was formless...but God brought forth order...light...expanse between the waters...ground...vegetation... creatures... and at every stage... he declared it was “good.”

And the pinnacle... Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over" all this good in creation...so human life is created (1:26)... he breathes into it... living soul... and when “ God saw all that he had made, and it was *very good*. (1:31)

But in the midst of all this good... there is a divine pause...a moment in which something not good had to be acknowledged...

“The LORD God said, "It is not good for man to be alone.” - Genesis 2:18 [1]

In poetic fashion when one human life is created... God pauses... because something is not complete...man is alone.

ALONE...There is something in the sheer nature of that state of being alone...that feels akin to death.

It’s an uncomfortable topic. Many of the epic stories of heroes almost try to **idealize the hero** who is the **lone outsider**... not bound to anyone... **but there is always a hint** that in their venture they connected in some small at least momentary way... a **seed of hope for their isolation**. Why? Because otherwise... we would be left only with a sense of tragedy.

When we think of being alone **just for brief times**...it can reflect something **positive** ...**healthy**...but as one’s ultimate state ... it speaks of something perhaps more tragic than death.

Connection leads to life...and is life-giving... which is why a lack of being connected feel akin to death.

Loneliness is correlated with the **odds of an early death by 26%... twice that of obesity**.

It’s being considered the quiet...and even deadly epidemic.

The percentage of Americans who responded that they regularly or frequently felt lonely was between **11% and 20% in the 1970s and 1980s** [the percentage varied depending on the study]. That has now grown **to nearly 30%** ...and as high as 45% for older adults.

Why is this a growing challenge? There are two primary challenges we face. [2]

We are not doing life in community... tribes...villages... or nearly any regular non-functional group.

> **This is why our small groups are central to our life. I hope you consider deeply the significance of what a Life Group means.**

The other force that making us more alone...is **technology**. Now I know that most of us have already heard comments about how negative it seems to see people in groups...even table meals...all staring at their individual devices. Moe is rising to the surface that we would be wise to consider.

Sherry Turkle is a professor in Science, Technology and Society at MIT and the founder and director of the MIT Initiative on Technology and Self. [3]

She had authored two pioneering books on how the digital age could expand the human spirit... and identity. And in **1996 she gave her first TEDTalk, “Celebrating our life on the internet.”** She was excited, as a psychologist, to take what people were learning in the virtual world and apply it to the physical world. It made the **cover of WIRED**.

She was described as the **evangelist of the internet**.

But that has all changed.

Her research revealed something else. It led to her more **recent book..., *Alone Together*,...** and a very recent TED Talk...in which she says she probably won't be on the cover of Wired magazine again...because she sees a problem.

She describes how **our true selves are being lost**...and we are losing the ability to make real connection. **These devices can diminish any real intimacy...because they are creating only an edited way of sharing ourselves.**

We're designing tech that will give us the illusion of friendship without the demands of companionship.

“We're lonely, but we're afraid of intimacy. And so from social networks to sociable robots, we're designing technologies that will give us the illusion of companionship without the demands of friendship.” - — Sherry Turkle

The recently released research of **Brian Primack, director of the Center for Research on Media, Technology and Health** at the **University of Pittsburgh**, found that among young adults, the more time spent on social media... platforms such as Facebook, Snapchat and Instagram was associated with feelings with higher levels of social isolation. [5]

The good news is that we are not alone. God created relationship...

Back to our initial words from genesis... we are told how God creates “one suitable for him”... not from nothing...but from him...later Adam is depicted as saying: This is now bone of my bones...flesh of my flesh”...and immediately God declares they are to multiply...

So is all good? Apparently not... because for all our pride in progressing, we feel less connected... and are having a hard time amazing relationships work.

Sociologists tells us that a culture laughs at what is most unresolved within it... and that couldn't be more clear... that what is most unresolved is our relationship to sex, love, and marriage.

SO today we are launch a focus and Fall series... entitled.... “Making Relationships Work... Love, Sex, Marriage”

... it is the way we understand these aspects of relationships that effect marriage....but this is not a series simply on marriage... but on how we think about

SO today I want to begin by choosing to rise up to face the simple truth....

1. You were not meant to be alone.

It is not good to be alone

"Loneliness is the most terrible poverty." - Mother Teresa

Even those who may be extroverts... very social in nature and skills...those unmarried and married.

And God knows...

What I believe God is calling us to face...is that apart from God ...our pursuit to overcome aloneness...to connect... is hindered by our lack of being rooted and secure.

1 John 3:11-12 (NIV)

This is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another. ¹² Do not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own actions were evil and his brother's were righteous.

The Bible describes human life now faced with life outside of the garden...outside of relationship with God...and immediately it describes how one brother becomes jealous and strikes down his brother. There is a sense that it came from **his lack of knowing acceptance...** he **doesn't appear to honor God ... and therefore finds no acceptance in God.**

This captures a challenging truth...

2. The unaccepted self can never fully love...nor connect with another.

At some level there can be more than just parts of ourselves we are disappointed in...we can wonder if they and we can really be accepted. We don't know what to do with the what we know is not good and honorable.

If we can't be fully accepted ... how can we really connect?

The truth is that human life has been connecting in limited ways. Let me describe....

Some limited forms of connection...

- **Control (force and fear)**

Clubs...kings...continues with whatever one may have... anger (wrath)... manipulation. It can begin with subtle manipulation...and grow in various forms of control...using guilt, money, sex, or criticism.

“If I can't get acceptance....I will use control to get a form of connection.”

- **Codependency (need)**

I know that **co-dependency** has become a bit too **cliché** for **therapeutic culture**...but it does capture a dynamic that **reflects pseudo connection**.

Sort of a reverse version... obligation... less person to person... bound by one's need...in the form of constant crisis on responsible hearts... co-dependency.

It is reflected in developing a relationship in which the connection has become one of an unhealthy dependency. A person may be trying to help someone...but the connection is not really defined by help as much as dependency.

Each is getting something from the other person's condition.

In truth ...**neither feels accepted at their core**...one is running from themselves...often in destructive ways...and the other **seeks to be needed.... As a substitute for being loved**.

“If I can't get acceptance... I will use need to have a form of connection.”

- **Contract (social exchange)**

Sociologists and Social psychologists...have deemed that the **most basic form of human relationship** can be described by the **“social exchange theory.”**

Social exchange theory posits that human relationships are formed by the use of a subjective cost-benefit analysis...based on individual self-interest which can be a combination of economic and psychological needs. [5]

Life is rooted in fairness...or navigating how we protect against unfairness.

Law...rules... even some of what we equate with religion...can become a form of trying protect against unfairness.

God does indeed want to protect justice... fairness. At a level...it can serve relationships.

But...it still bears limitations to connection.

It can reduce the exchange to something merely pragmatic. It is not so much from the heart but fear...not so much a relationship to what is personal...but to what is principle.

So even **religion when reduced to a system of principles**...may be limited in helping us not be alone. It might help us be safe...but still alone.

Fairness has it's limits... it is vital to justice... “eye for an eye...no more”...But by itself... it cannot change us.

Like any rules...they contain and restrain...at best.

Jesus knows that our heartsthat human life separated from God will seek to find affirmation in other “gods”... most commonly in elements of life which may be good in themselves, but become controlling when God’s love is not ruling our lives.

As Jesus came to restore God’s reign over life, he engaged how this involves the transformation of what controls us...particularly greed, lust, power, and anger (contempt).

We need a force that is greater than fairness.

We need that which can free us from our unacceptable condition.

We need a love that is rooted outside us...that is the divine love of God.

It is not rooted in need. It can reach beyond what is fair.

1 John 3:16, 4:7, 9-11, 19 (NIV)

This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers....⁷ Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. ...⁹ This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. ¹⁰ This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us

and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. ¹¹ Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another...¹⁹ We love because he first loved us.

John captured several rich points in his writing...but one that he captures is this...

3. God's love provides for our love... beyond mere need and fairness

God's form of love brings something that changes us.

We may hear the words here in English... and the word "love" sound familiar. But John was using a word that spoke of a distinct love... he **uses the word "agape"** to speak of a **divine force...a divine love.**

God's agape love is **spiritual in nature**...in other words...it **relates to the core** of who we are... it **transcends** that which is related to our **bodily attractions** or **social benefits.**

Used by Christ to describe the **love among the persons of the Trinity**, it is also the love he commanded his followers to have for one another (John 13:34-35). It is totally selfless love, which seeks not one's own advantage but only to benefit or share with another. [6]

Doesn't mean that those who do not surrender to God don't love...or can't love... We were created by love... it's part of our nature... but only a remnant of what was intended...an echo of a voice now lost.

As John describes...Agape love **does not come naturally** to us. Such love can **only come from its Source.** This is the love that "has been **poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit**, who has been given to us" when we became His children ([Romans 5:5](#); cf. [Galatians 5:22](#)). "This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters" ([1 John 3:16](#)). Because of God's love toward us, we are able to love one another.

We will never truly break the bounds of the unaccepted self...without divine acceptance.

The good news is that...We can grow in love as we draw upon the source of ultimate love

So as we embark on God speaking into our relational lives in the weeks ahead... to ways in which...I want to invite us to begin by knowing that...

- **It is God who knows that it is not good for you to be alone.**
- **It is God who comes to bring the acceptance... and the source by which we can love.**

Essence of what can infuse and change us... friendships...family... dating... marriage ...sex...conflict.

CONCLUSION:

Making relationships work **begins with a choice to grow in being loved by God.**

The most valuable thing we can do to help make our relationships work... is to invest in knowing God's love.

We can only give what we have. It's akin to how we are told on an airplane flight...would there be a crisis that requires oxygen masks...the masks will drop...and parents... PUT YOURS ON FIRST. Because only then can you help someone else.

I want to invite you to **want that love that gives...not just takes....that knows acceptance...so it can accept. [7]**

It's choice to desire to become bigger.

Resources:

Notes:

1. The practical value of never being alone is also captured in Ecclesiastes 4:9-10 (ESV)

“Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow. But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up!”

2. Chronic Loneliness Is a Modern-Day Epidemic, Laura Entis, Jun 22, 2016 - Interview with John Cacioppo, the director of the University of Chicago's Center for Cognitive and Social Neuroscience and author of [*Loneliness: Human Nature and the Need for Social Connection*](#) (W. W. Norton & Co., 2009).

3. Among other sources that tell her story, “Places we don't want to go: Sherry Turkle at TED2012” (Posted by: [Ben Lillie](#) March 1, 2012) - <http://blog.ted.com/places-we-dont-want-to-go-sherry-turkle-at-ted2012/> and The Innovation of Loneliness - <https://vimeo.com/70534716>

Connected, but Alone? Sherry Turkle - https://www.ted.com/talks/sherry_turkle_alone_together

In her TED Talk she notes...

All edited... never our actual self.

Offers is 3 ideas that are not true...that we can focus on whatever we want... that we will always be heard...that we will never be alone.

“I share...therefore I am.”

4. Similar info regarding technology...

Feeling Lonely? Too Much Time On Social Media May Be Why by KATHERINE HOBSON, March 6, 2017

Young adults who spend more than two hours a day on social media are more apt to feel isolated.

For young adults, social media may not be so social after all.

Among people in that age group, heavy use of platforms such as Facebook, Snapchat and Instagram was associated with feelings of social isolation, a study finds.

The results surprised study co-author [Brian Primack](#). "It's social media, so aren't people going to be socially connected?" he says. He's director of the Center for Research on Media, Technology and Health at the University of Pittsburgh. And while his team's previous research [connecting social media use and depression](#) in young adults wasn't terribly surprising, these new results seemed counterintuitive.

5. Social Exchange Theory. The Social Exchange Framework was formally advanced in the late 1950s and early 1960s in the work of the sociologists George Homans (1961) and Peter Blau (1964) and the work of social psychologists John Thibaut and Harold Kelley (1959).

[Social Exchange Theory - Encyclopedia.com](#) / www.encyclopedia.com/social-sciences-and-law/sociology-and-social.../social-27

6. Regarding the nature of agape love,

<https://www.catholicculture.org/culture/library/dictionary/index.cfm?id=31698>

Outside of the New Testament, the word *agape* is used in a variety of contexts, but in the New Testament it takes on a distinct meaning. *Agape* is used to describe the love that is of and from God, whose very nature is love itself: "God is love" ([1 John 4:8](#)). God does not merely love; He is love itself. Everything God does flows from His love. *Agape* is also used to describe our love for God ([Luke 10:27](#)), a servant's faithful respect to his master ([Matthew 6:24](#)), and a man's attachment to things ([John 3:19](#)).

We are to love others with agape love, whether they are fellow believers ([John 13:34](#)) or bitter enemies ([Matthew 5:44](#)). Jesus gave the parable of the Good Samaritan as an example of sacrifice for the sake of others, even for those who may care nothing at all for us. Agape love as modeled by Christ is not based on a feeling; rather, it is a determined act of the will, a joyful resolve to put the welfare of others above our own.

- <https://www.gotquestions.org/agape-love.html>

7. The ability to love flows from God accepting us...and knowing that he is always with us.

Hebrews 13:5 ESV - Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."

Matthew 28:20 (NIV) - and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

Deuteronomy 31:6 (NIV) - Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the LORD your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you."

Psalms 27:10 (NIV) - Though my father and mother forsake me, the LORD will receive me.

Consider also...

Romans 5:8 (ESV) - But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

1 Corinthians 13:1-13 (ESV) - If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing. Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; ...

Ephesians 5:25 (ESV) - Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her,

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Genesis 2:18*

1. You were not meant _____.

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