

One Is The Loneliest Number

1. Warm up: What was your favorite thing about this year's Superbowl – the Seahawks, the Patriots, Bad Bunny, Green Day, Coco Jones, a TV commercial, the Puppy Bowl?
2. On Sunday we continued our sermon series called “By Their Fruits You Will Know Them – 8 Core Characteristics of Authentic Followers of Jesus” by exploring a fourth core characteristic: **Authentic followers of Jesus are deeply devoted to spiritual community.**
 - a. When in your life have you felt most isolated from spiritual community? What caused that isolation? How did it feel?
 - b. When in your life have you felt most connected to spiritual community? How did that feel?
 - c. The Bible says, “It is not good that the *adam* [human] should be alone.” Genesis 2:18. Studies show that the pain of rejection and isolation is processed in some of the same parts of the brain as physical pain. Why do you think God wired us up that way?
 - d. Jeff said, “We all need somewhere that we belong, a place where we fit, where we're understood and embraced. So that means, if I'm a person for whom spiritual life is at the core of my being, I need to be around other people who share that same passion. Why? Because if the quest for God and God's goodness is the deepest passion of my heart, spiritual community will become the place of my deepest belonging.” Does that statement make sense to you? Does our longing for spiritual community grow as our passion for God grows? Your thoughts?
3. Jesus himself modeled the critical importance of being deeply connected to spiritual community. At the outset of his ministry, he set about to create a *Yeshiva*. A *Yeshiva* was a group of disciples who spent lots of time together intensely dialoguing over all aspects of life and how the Scriptures apply, with the guidance of their rabbi. This was a standard part of the rabbinic methodology – to create a spiritual community where practical questions could be discussed and sorted through, and where everyone supported, challenged, and encouraged each other to live what they were learning.
 - a. Mark 3:13 tells us that, “Jesus went up the mountain and called to him those whom he wanted, and they came to him. And he appointed the twelve to be with him and to be sent out to proclaim the message.” Luke 8:1 tells us, “The twelve were with him, as well as some women . . . , Mary Magdalene . . . , Joanna . . . , and Susanna, and many others.” Why do you think Jesus needed others “to be with him?” Why do you think Jesus needed others to help “proclaim the message?”
 - b. Once when Jesus' biological family came to see him and someone told him “Your mother and brothers are outside waiting to see you,” Jesus replied, “Who are my mother and my brothers?” And looking at those who sat around him, he said, ‘Here

- are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.” Mark 3:33. In other words, at least in some respects, Jesus felt closer to his spiritual family than his biological family. That may not be the same for all of us, depending on the dynamics of our family and our spiritual community. But how would you compare your feelings for your biological family and your spiritual community? Closer? Less close? About the same?
- c. On the night before his crucifixion, Jesus “eagerly desired to eat” his final meal with his spiritual family. Afterward, when he went to the garden to pray, he asked several members of his spiritual family to go along to watch and pray with him. How do you imagine it felt to Jesus to be surrounded by his spiritual community on his last night?
4. Read Matthew 16:13-18, as printed on p. 3. In this passage, Jesus declared, “I will build my church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it.” The Greek word for “church” is *ekklesia*, which means “assembly,” *i.e.*, a group of people who gather for a specific purpose – in this case, for spiritual community. The wording here suggests that the forces of hell will do anything they can to try to attack and separate us from spiritual community, so we need to be on our guard. What might be the thing that is most likely to tempt you to drift or push away from church community?
 5. On Sunday, Jeff laid out three reasons why it’s so important that we be deeply connected to spiritual community. **First, spiritual community is where we get to explore life’s great questions together, learning from each other.**
 - a. What’s something important you’ve learned from others here at LifeJourney during your time here?
 - b. Now flip the script because spiritual community isn’t just about what we receive, but also what we’re able to share with others. What’s an important bit of spiritual wisdom or insight you’ve learned over the course of your life that you feel you can share with others here at LifeJourney?
 6. **Second, spiritual community is where we find spiritual and emotional support, encouragement, and challenge.**
 - a. During your time here at LifeJourney, when have you faced something in your life where you needed spiritual and emotional support? Did you find support? What form did that support take?
 - b. During your time here at LifeJourney, when have you been able to offer spiritual and emotional support to someone who needed it? What form did that support take?
 - c. Read the quote from Brene Brown on the next page. What are your thoughts?

Questions completed next page . . .

7. Third, spiritual community is a force multiplier that enables us to do greater things for God working together than we could ever do alone.

- a. What's something our church is doing right now – internally or externally – that really resonates with you?
- b. Read the quote printed below that a newcomer to LifeJourney recently sent to Jeff. Do you agree with the sentiment expressed in this note? What are some of the things you feel the world most needs from a church like ours?

Matthew 16:13-18

¹³ Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, 'Who do people say that the Son of Man is?'

¹⁴ And they said, 'Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.'¹⁵ He said to them, 'But who do you say that I am?' ¹⁶ Simon Peter answered, 'You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.'

¹⁷ And Jesus answered him, 'Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven. ¹⁸ And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hell will not prevail against it.'

Brene Brown

"I definitely went [back to church] for all the wrong reasons. I really went because life is hard and it hurts, and all the midlife unraveling books say, 'Go back to church, that's what everybody does.' So I went back to church thinking that it would be like an epidural, like it would take the pain away, like you know, the church would make the pain go away. And then [I discovered that] faith and church was not like an epidural at all; it was more like a midwife who just stood next to me and said, 'Push! It's supposed to hurt.'"

Note from a Newcomer to LifeJourney

"What a time to be part of something so great and meaningful. We've been given this amazing opportunity to make such an impact, and I feel now more than ever that the world needs LifeJourney. I think it's more important than ever to keep our feet on the gas and begin moving into the next phase of preparation for what is coming. Thank you to everyone who works so hard to keep things going, and for the opportunity to be a part of something big."