

Trinitarian Community

Isolation—part 5

I need Trinitarian community (**Trinitarian community**)

May 22, 2022

1. ISOLATION series review:

Week 1: I need community that delivers truth that comes alive in everyday life in everyday people (**Spiritual theology**)

Week 2: I need community that stirs an appetite to want to be more like Jesus (**Spiritual formation**)

Week 3: I need a spiritual community (**Spiritual community**)

Week 4: I need a missional community (**Missional community**)

Week 5: I need Trinitarian community (**Trinitarian community**)

DAY 1: What is Trinitarian community? (Community #1)

John 17:20 “My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, ²¹ that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. ²² I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one—

2. The oneness Jesus prays for among His people is not doctrinal unity or church polity unity. It is relational unity. How do we know that? The way Jesus illustrates oneness is the oneness that God the Father and Jesus share within the Trinity.

3. How do we move the love of God from our head to our heart? From the experience of two certain kinds of community. Community #1 is the Trinitarian community. Community #2 is God’s people learning to love and relate the way He does.

John 17:23 I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

4. Jesus says that the experience of unity in Community #2 gives us a taste of Community #1.

5. God made us to experience real unadulterated love, love freely given in spite of weakness, flaws and sins. Our hearts will not be satisfied with anything less.

6. That kind of love is only found at the cross! That is the fountainhead of what we need!

Romans 5:8 But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

7. We get small sips of Trinitarian love through relationships with God’s people (Community #2)

8. What strikes you from today’s devotional?

DAY 2: Coming alive to Trinitarian community through loneliness

1. Christians are often perplexed about why we can have truths in our heads but they don't seem to penetrate our hearts. Experiencing God's love is one of these topics.

2. Why don't we feel the love of God more deeply? Why do we know God loves us, but sometimes that seems no more impactful than what we ate for breakfast? Why is that?

3. Some of the simple answers include these.
 - a. We believe that our real love needs are to be met through people.
 - b. We believe that we have what it takes to manage our relationships well.
 - c. Even when our relationships are less than ideal, or even troubled, we still don't *naturally* look to God.
 - d. Even if we do look to God, it's only to fix our relationships, not to find our deepest love met in Him.

4. Our *natural* inclinations are self-focused, not God-focused or other-focused.

5. What finally gets our attention? Loneliness!

6. Loneliness is not just the experience of being "lonely" as in needing a companion. Loneliness occurs *naturally* in this world. Loneliness is the qualitative and quantitative difference between God filling our hearts with *unadulterated* love and every other human effort to fill ourselves with *any* kind of love.

7. It is the *blessing* of loneliness that awakens us to our need of a very different kind of love—divine love. (We will look at this in detail next week). For the Christian this is **not** just a **one-time** recognition of truth—there is no human substitute for God's love. Though that is true, loneliness pops up as *regular* reminders that we are trusting someone or something else for what only God can give us. We are trusting others to come through for us, and we are trusting our ability to gain that kind of love through others. This will happen every week until we die!

8. Our souls and hearts ache for something deeper than what any human being can give us.

Loneliness is not a problem to solve.
It is an invitation to return, in real time, to the Lord.

9. What strikes you from today's devotional?

DAY 3: Coming alive to God-implanted, deeper desires

1. Yesterday, we looked at why God's truths so often reside in our heads but not resonate in our hearts. Today, let's look at some deeper reasons for this.

a. I **naturally** feel more alive to my:

- Immediate desires,
- "Needs," as I define them,
- Immediate sources of relief,
- Frustrations, annoyances, and hurts.

b. I **naturally** feel less alive to your:

- Frustrations, annoyances, and hurts.

c. I **naturally** feel less alive to my:

- Desire for God, to live in His ways, to relate to Him, and relate like Him.

2. What strikes you from these lists?

3. Romans 6 is a comprehensive answer to that question. I am either "alive" to sin and "dead" to righteousness, or alive to righteousness and dead to sin. We tend to think of this difference generically, but the issue is really lived every day of our lives.

*Romans 6:11 In the same way, **count** yourselves **dead to sin** but **alive to God in Christ Jesus**.¹² Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires.¹³ Do not offer any part of yourself to sin as an instrument of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer every part of yourself to him as an instrument of righteousness.*

4. Romans 6:11 tells us that two different inclinations lie in the heart of every redeemed believer. Originally there is the *natural* and *fleshly* nature in us. Second, at our conversion God implants the "new man" (our new nature). The fleshly nature follows "evil desires," while our new inclination can live as "*an instrument of righteousness*." For the redeemed person, both natures exist inside the believer.

5. To "count" ourselves dead to sin but alive to God simply means that by the Spirit's power we need not follow sin's inclinations. We can "consider" them "dead" (**in the moment**) and consider ourselves alive to the things of the Spirit.

*Romans 7:5 Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires.
6 The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace.
7 The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so.*

6. What strikes you from today's devotional?

DAY 4: Accessing God's deeper desires in the redeemed heart

1. We are all addicts to self, to our needs, to our hurts, to our desires, first. The bible gives this condition a technical term: "sin." Our secular world calls this narcissism, but I don't know if I've ever heard someone admit that they are a narcissist, while I've had plenty of spouses complain to me over the years that their spouse is a narcissist.

2. This condition lives within me. How can I deal with it? It won't go away by trying harder. It won't go away with renewed resolutions or promises. If nothing works, then we finally go to counseling, and if that doesn't work we start going to church.

3. As we said in DAY 2, loneliness is one of the keys that unlocks God's deeper desires in our redeemed heart. Rather than try to solve loneliness, we are to **embrace** the reality of loneliness. But we are meant to embrace **any** difficult or painful emotion, not deny it or try to solve it. Why? Because like loneliness, fear, confusion, discouragement, anxiety, etc. are all meant to be the keys that unlock our deeper, godly desires deep in the redeemed person's heart!

4. Embracing our loneliness for a love and connection we just cannot manufacture is meant to awaken us to the reality that our hearts' deeper desires is for a deeper love than any human can give us. It is at this very point that our hearts need to "cry out" to the Lord for His deeper love.

Psalm 42:1 As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, my God. ² My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God? ³ My tears have been my food day and night, while people say to me all day long, "Where is your God?" ⁴ These things I remember as I pour out my soul: how I used to go to the house of God under the protection of the Mighty One with shouts of joy and praise among the festive throng. ⁵ Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God.

5. The psalmist is describing a thirst he has discovered deep in his soul for God. Now he puts words to that thirst. As a result of embracing his emptiness and heartache (vv. 1-3) what begins to come to the surface? (vv. 4-5)

6. In Psalm 27, David embraces a crippling fear. Enemies and foes are all around him. David also **embraces** his fear by putting words to it, and voicing those words audibly to God.

Psalm 27:1 The LORD is my light and my salvation— whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life— of whom shall I be afraid? ² When the wicked advance against me to devour me, it is my enemies and my foes who will stumble and fall. ³ Though an army besiege me, my heart will not fear; though war break out against me, even then I will be confident. ⁴ One thing I ask from the LORD, this only do I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze on the beauty of the LORD and to seek him in his temple. ⁵ For in the day of trouble he will keep me safe in his dwelling; he will hide me in the shelter of his sacred tent and set me high upon a rock. ⁶ Then my head will be exalted above the enemies who surround me; at his sacred tent I will sacrifice with shouts of joy; I will sing and make music to the LORD.

7. As David puts words to his fears, what things begin to percolate from down deep in his heart?

8. What strikes you from today's devotional?

DAY 5: Alive to Trinitarian love and freedom in our redeemed hearts

1. What kind of change is spiritual formation making? Consider the raw material we were before we came to Christ.

*Isaiah 53:6 All we like sheep have **gone astray**. Each of us has turned to **his own way**, but the Lord has laid on Him the wickedness of us all.*

2. As human beings we want, believe, choose, and feel. Without Christ, all four of these human capacities are dead to God. They are like a bounce house for kids to enjoy but no one can find a generator to blow it up. Before we come to Christ we **want** our own way. We **don't believe** we need God, not in a functional, daily way. We believe we need something or someone other than God. We **choose** to meet our needs according to how we **feel** and what we believe would make us feel better. We create messes and we are a mess.

3. At our conversion to Christ, all four of these human capacities have found their generator. The bounce house comes to life. Christ is alive not only generically in us, but specifically in us changing these human capacities.

- We begin to **want** what He wants more than we want what we want.

Phil. 3:8 I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things and consider them trash that I may gain Christ.

- We **believe** that giving is more important getting, serving is more important than convenience, loving is more important than protecting myself from hurt. And we believe that we can now do any of those things no matter how badly we feel.

Phil. 4:13 I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

- We now have the **power to choose** to do what is right in spite of our feelings.

Galatians 5:1 It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.

- We can **experience** the fruit of the Spirit even when we don't feel the fruit of the Spirit.

Galatians 5:22-23 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control...

4. I can be content and live contented even when I don't feel content. I can experience a rest in my soul even when I feel restless.

Philippians 4:11-12 I know how to be in need and I know how to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want.

5. I want to be a part of a community that sees Christ pop up in you, and you see Christ pop up in me, EVEN WITH THE MESS AND IN SPITE OF MY MESS.

6. When do these truths really come alive in us? When do these truths from our "head" to our "heart"? Through the surprising door of emptiness and loneliness. On the other side of that door Jesus Christ will meet us, over and over and over again, thousands of times and take us deeper.

7. What strikes you from today's devotional?

Extra material:

HE OFTEN GIVES US TASTES OF HIS TRINITARIAN LOVE THROUGH FLAWED BUT REDEEMED PEOPLE, LIKE US, IN COMMUNITY.

Community #2: When we enjoy and reflect Trinitarian love to one another.

The effect of Community #2 is to:

1. Give each other a taste of Community #1.
2. Whet our appetite for that real kind of love found in the Trinity.
3. Motivate us to give that kind of Trinitarian love in our relationships.

→ Becoming like Jesus, relationally.

About six weeks ago I got **hearing aids**. They are pretty impressive items! The folks that designed them made them virtually idiot-proof, which is mandatory in my case. I can adjust the volume up or down for both hearing aids in one second, just by pushing a little button.

The birds chirp louder outside our front door. Our fountain's splashing sounds like a Rocky Mountain stream in our back yard. I can hear better at a crowded restaurant, or when I'm having a conversation with a soft-talker.

Loneliness is like our soul's hearing aids. Ironically, loneliness awakens me to hear what I'm doing. I'm **relying** on someone or something for my sense of well-being, love, importance or satisfaction. When someone or something fails I will *naturally* feel lonely.

Loneliness is not problem to solve.

My redeemed soul is telling me I have a need for an exchange, in the moment, of ultimate or immediate trusts. I have been trusting someone or something for my sense of well-being and ultimately that's a very bad idea. I'll make a mess of me. I'll make a mess of you. I'll make a mess of our relationship.

Matthew 24:12 When wickedness is multiplied, most men's love will grow cold.

Wickedness is not just rape or murder. Wickedness is the me-firstness in our hearts. Jesus says, "You let that me-firstness grow and develop in your hearts, then don't be surprised when love grows cold."

Loneliness awakens me to then hear the gospel invitation all over again.

Matthew 11:28 Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.

²⁹ Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

You might ask, "If all that is true,

Alive and dead verses

The solution of the gospel

This is where the gospel comes in. Loneliness brings to the surface the deeper needs of my soul that turn me away from the usual pleasure or relief routes to something deeper. Pleasure's deeper drive has several deeper desires, not just the surface desires that are met with a quick fix. Deeper desires include the desire to be wanted, to be loved, to be valued, to sense your innate importance, and that you matter. Human solutions don't go deep enough nor touch these deeper desires. The gospel answers all those deeper desires.

I am wanted, and have always been wanted by God—to be in His family. I am loved by God. All I have to do is remember the cross. I am valued by God. When I consider the depth of my sin, His value of me is all the more stunning. I am important to God, important enough to begin and finish the act of my redemption. I do matter to God. Even what appear the smallest of my kindnesses or smallest of service is the raw material in His hand that pushes His Larger Story forward.

My self-imposed roadblocks to gospel truth

→I have set up significant roadblocks for God to get through me.

*Romans 1:18 The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people, who **suppress the truth** by their wickedness...*

*Romans 1:25 They **exchanged the truth** about God for a lie...*

The problem with us is that gospel truths can remain in our heads and not impact our hearts. One reason is we insist on getting these needs met our way. A second reason is we use a different metric to tell us the reality of these truths. The metrics we use are (1) Is God helping me get the life I want? (2) Is He protecting me from pain and suffering? (3) Is He answering my prayers the way I think He should? When God doesn't cooperate with my way of doing things I lose interest in God, and become more narcissistic and determined to get my needs met any way I see fit.

I want the cure for my addiction to self without God's remedy of curing my addiction. It's the same as this: I want a cure for my cancer without having to take chemotherapy.

Moving gospel truth from my head to my heart

This is not to dismiss theological truth or what I'm calling head truth. Feelings wise, I may not feel that I matter that much to God. But just because my feelings are in a different place doesn't mean the truth of God is irrelevant. It is anchoring! Because it is true, and not felt, I can still choose to live and relate the way Jesus would. Why? Because He is alive and in me.

*2 Peter 1:3 His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. ⁴ Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, **having escaped the corruption** in the world **caused by evil desires**.*

How does God move theological head and brain truths to heart and felt truths? In His community. We get tastes of all of these deeper desires in relationships with people who have tasted these desires met by God.

I wonder what would happen if the following happened. Let's say I came to church on Sunday, and someone else was giving the message. After the message a friend asked me how I was doing. "I felt a lot of loneliness this week. I've really felt a stronger addiction to feeling better, and a strong pull to find relief any way I can."

What kind of response would I hope to have from you? You might say, “How’s your time in the word been lately?” Or you might say, “I’ll pray for you this week.” Or you might say, “Don’t worry, you’ll bounce back soon.” Maybe you’d try to cheer me up.

As I got back in my car to drive home, I’d likely still feel the ache of loneliness—or rather aloneness. Does somebody understand how I feel? How I struggle? Am I alone in this battle?

Proverbs 25:11 A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in a setting of silver.

Proverbs 18:2 Fools find no pleasure in understanding but delight in airing their own opinions.

Hebrews 4:15 For we have not a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weakness, but one who has been tempted in every way, as we are—and yet without sin.

I would hope that what I said about experiencing more acutely this week a sense of emptiness would resonate with you. It would not surprise you. In fact, you might even be looking for where God is working in me. “Seth, I am amazed at God’s power to speak through you even when you have had such a hard week.” Or, “Seth, I marvel at our God that He can enable you to still love people even when you feel lonely.” Or, “Seth, I see in you a man that just keeps following Jesus no matter what happens around you or in you.”

Those kinds of responses are kinds of responses that someone who really understood 2 Peter 1:3-4 would make to a fellow struggler. *You would know* God is working in me, no matter what *I* thought was happening. God wants us to “share in the divine nature.”

An inside look at spiritual formation

That is the kind of community we need. Spiritual formation happens in this kind of community.

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At our conversion to Christ, all four of these human capacities have found their generator. The bounce house comes to life. Christ is alive not only generically in us, but specifically in us changing these human capacities.

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THROUGH FLAWED BUT REDEEMED PEOPLE, LIKE US, IN COMMUNITY.

EXTRA MATERIAL:

*John 17:26 "I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known **in order that the love you have for me may be in them** and that I myself may be in them."*