The book cover features a background of overlapping, semi-transparent circles in various colors including blue, yellow, orange, pink, and red. A fine grid pattern is overlaid on the entire cover. The text is positioned in the upper right and lower center areas.

**The 5
Relationships
Jesus Needed
and Why You
Need Them Too**

BLUEPRINT FOR BELONGING

ALLI PATTERSON

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**The 5 Relationships Jesus Needed
and Why You Need Them Too**

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a division of Baker Publishing Group
Grand Rapids, Michigan

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Published by Revell
a division of Baker Publishing Group
Grand Rapids, Michigan
RevellBooks.com

Printed in the United States of America

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Patterson, Alli, 1977– author.

Title: Blueprint for belonging : the 5 relationships Jesus needed and why you need them too / Alli Patterson.

Description: Grand Rapids, Michigan : Revell, a division of Baker Publishing Group, [2025]

Identifiers: LCCN 2024014223 | ISBN 9780800742331 (paperback) | ISBN 9780800746803 (casebound) | ISBN 9781493448692 (ebook)

Subjects: LCSH: Spiritual formation. | Fellowship—Religious aspects—Christianity. | Jesus Christ—Example.

Classification: LCC BV4511 .P375 2025 | DDC 248.4—dc23/eng/20240513

LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2024014223>

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Illustrations by David Valentine

The author is represented by Alive Literary Agency, www.aliveliterary.com.

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25 26 27 28 29 30 31 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

To Bill, Andrew, Luke, Zoe, and Hope:
I love the place of belonging we have created together.

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INTRODUCTION

Living Lonely

I remember sitting at a table in my little black dress, watching the women around me laugh and talk, some '90s rap and a few friends nearby begging me to come to the dance floor. My date at the formal event that night had been my boyfriend for three years and we had just gotten engaged. I was by no means *alone*, but all these years later I still remember the hollow, empty sensation I felt inside. I was watching the evening happen around me, wondering if anyone else ever felt like I did in this crowd. I was invited. I belonged there, but I felt utterly and completely alone. Since we were on a boat, I had to stay a few more hours, but when I walked down the dock, I felt a wave of relief. I was hoping whatever triggered the tide of loneliness that came in that night would leave just as quickly. Until recently, I didn't understand why *that* situation with *those* people made me feel so terribly alone.

Humans have never felt more alone than we feel right now. Strangely, this is during an era when we have also never had

a greater ability to stay connected. We are far more connected through our phones and social media than through the world of email and BlackBerrys that I had access to that night of the party on the boat. Yet loneliness now tops the list of mental and physical health crises for millions across the globe, with some nations even declaring it a new kind of epidemic. To me, this is clear evidence that the way we are pursuing relationships just isn't working for us. Our relational worlds aren't satisfying our basic human need for a secure sense of belonging and connection. We are living life far too lonely.

Loneliness is misalignment between the type of connections we *have* and the type we *need* for a thriving life. Human beings were intentionally designed by God to need and receive much of what makes a thriving life—first from him and then from other people. I'm not talking about external needs like work or food or transportation (though of course people are involved in those needs as well!), but rather our *internal* need to feel loved and connected, the sense that we belong somewhere, with someone. When that's missing, we walk through life feeling alone even if there are people everywhere we look.

Every one of us is designed to experience relationships where we feel **known, included, encouraged, welcomed, and expectant**. The roots of all five of these types of relationships start in our connection with God and take shape in and through our human relationships. When we live without the relationships we need, our souls are not fully satisfied: we're lonely. Most of us have probably learned to live this way, and it's been a long time since we felt the warmth and benefit of all five of these aspects of human connection. We all struggle sometimes to shake off the feeling that, when it comes right down to it, we are alone.

The head-scratching thing about loneliness is that everyone's experience of it is a little bit different. Most of us can't even explain *why* we feel lonely at certain times, like when I was at that party and surrounded by friends. Loneliness doesn't necessarily go away just because you have a few decent relationships in your life. The feeling creeps back in, creating days or even seasons when you might struggle to hear anything but the echo of the still-empty places in your life.

One type of relationship isn't meant to satisfy all your various needs for a sense of belonging. Just because you have a best friend doesn't mean you don't need the encouragement of people on the same life mission. Just because you have an extended family who loves you doesn't mean you don't need a group who will invite you to their BBQs. Just because you have a great work team doesn't mean you wouldn't welcome someone offering a new challenge in your life. One type of relationship that's working well just isn't enough, and neither is two or three. You are designed for all five!

A design for the variety of human relationships we need is found in the life of Jesus. His relational world contains a *blueprint of connection*. He walked through life unlike any other person, connected to the Father and operating in *five different types of relationships* that are part of meeting our deepest needs for human belonging. There are observable patterns to the priorities and tendencies he showed with each of these groups. I've combed through every single relationship that is recorded in the life of Jesus during his thirty-three years on earth and have found some fascinating patterns. He worked, connected, loved, and opened himself up differently in each space. Even though he, too, felt pain in this world, he put his relationships together in a way that resulted in thriving human bonds. The design of his relational world

meant he lived far less lonely than we do in our more modern, “connected” world. As I uncovered this blueprint in the life of Christ and laid it on top of my own relational world, I found some pretty big holes in mine. And what’s even more interesting is that these missing connections were linked to the very times and places in my life where I tended to feel the most alone. Could it be that the depth and design of each layer of our relational worlds are linked to the specific kinds of loneliness we each experience?

I’ve been looking for ways to pursue my missing connections because I believe that God wants more for me. I believe he wants to help me connect more deeply to other people because it’s part of his design for human life. As I began to overlay this blueprint from Jesus onto my own life, it provided new insights for the strongest relationships in my life and also helped explain part of my long-standing discomfort in my family of origin. It became a new lens through which to view all the connections in my life. This blueprint empowered me to begin creating something new, and I started to take baby steps toward what I hope will be a long-term redesign of my relational world. I decided not to accept the idea that I would always feel a little bit lonely.

Most of us haven’t really thought about the “why” and “how” behind the way we approach our relationships. I’m guessing you haven’t arranged them in your life according to any real design. Most of us have simply collected family and friends over time, trying to hold on to them as best we can as the years go by. You may never have imagined there would be a way to bring order and intention to the haphazard way these connections are shaped, or that whether you do so may affect your own struggle with loneliness. After observing the life of Jesus, I’m convinced there is a strong connection. God wants

you to experience a thriving life and fewer waves of loneliness. I believe he left help in the life of his Son. As you pattern your life after Christ in any significant way, you begin to live more fully alive. The way you pursue relationships is no different.

This book could be the beginning of a relational redesign of your life, but it won't be the end. I hope it will bring you some new language, some insight from Scripture, and some ways to begin a provocative discussion with God about which connections bring life, which ones you need to relocate, and which ones might not be as real as they look. You'll have to walk this path far beyond the blueprint presented in this book because relationships are a long and messy business. That's the reason I almost didn't write this book: it sounded like a topic for someone with more ideal relationships in their life. If there is such a thing as a relationship expert, I'm certainly not it. I can think of much better counselors and much better friends. However, I couldn't look away from the biggest heartache in our culture today, not when I knew the life of Jesus could offer a glimmer of help and hope.

Loneliness is the built-in alarm that something isn't relationally right in our lives. It's getting louder, and many people are taking notice. In May 2023, US Surgeon General Dr. Vivek Murthy issued a warning that the long-term impact of loneliness on one's health is the equivalent of smoking fifteen cigarettes per day. He said, "Our relationships are a source of healing and well-being hiding in plain sight—one that can help us live healthier, more fulfilled, and more productive lives."¹

1. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, "New Surgeon General Advisory Raises Alarm about the Devastating Impact of the Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation in the United States," May 3, 2023, <https://www.hhs.gov/about/news/2023/05/03/new-surgeon-general-advisory-raises-alarm-about-devastating-impact-epidemic-loneliness-isolation-united-states.html>.

I agree that the secret to living less lonely is hidden inside our relationships. But the report goes on to outline six pillars of what the government will do to fix this problem. A government might be able to reconstruct neighborhoods and health-care systems, but it cannot solve the aches of a human heart. It cannot change our motives in the way we pursue our family and friends. Health-care policies, new urban housing plans, extra playgrounds, and online habits may be things a government can design, but there is a God who designed you as a whole soul and has the keys to your thriving. The first step toward a life of greater connection is acknowledging his design and considering where and how you are living outside of it. Come with me on this journey into the relational world of Jesus to witness the layers of relationships in his life. Along the way, my hope is for you to discover the first step toward greater belonging and away from whatever kind of loneliness you feel today. You were designed by a God who loves you and wants you to live feeling known, included, encouraged, welcomed, and expectant. And much, much less lonely.



The Life of a Soul

Then the LORD God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.

Genesis 2:7

My great-aunt Flo studied everyone's breasts. Florence had a reputation in the family for walking up to female relatives and asking, "Are those real?" Exactly zero women in my family have breast implants, so no one can quite account for this preoccupation. Young or old, large or small, you could be sure that Flo would be at every family wedding or holiday in her push-up bra, staring at what was in yours. Flo was convinced the real ones had a certain shape, a certain way they moved, a certain density. If she wasn't sure about yours,

she looked and watched and evaluated . . . and eventually just asked. It was possible that your answer might be followed up with questions about whether there was something stuffed inside your bra. I learned early on to steer clear of her at family events—or at least to wear something loose fitting. If I were putting it nicely, I'd say she was a “character.” Flo certainly left us a lot of family stories for Thanksgiving.

What you are going to do in this book is a bit like what Flo did. You are going to stare intently at something that's hard to see clearly: the life of your soul. You are going to wonder and ask questions about the form, shape, and density of what can seem invisible. You are going to ask about empty places on the inside and how they connect to relationships on the outside. You are going to bravely consider if you might be living with a less thriving soul than you could have. But what even *is* a soul? How do you evaluate the health and form of something that's hard to put into words or see?

Or is it?

I used to think of my soul and my body as two completely different things: my body was just a bag of bones, and my soul was the thing inside it that flies off to heaven when I die. I am a linear thinker, so clean categories like this appeal to me. I used to draw harder lines between the pieces of me that are visible and those that are invisible. However, the more I live life and read Scripture, the less these firmly separated categories make sense to me. The picture of humanity in the Bible isn't so sharply divided between body and soul. Rather, it's a picture of a beautifully integrated creation. The biblical idea of a soul isn't something you possess inside a body: it's what you *are*. You are a soul. You are an integrated, whole, embodied human soul who is alive because of the life force that the Bible calls *ruach*—the Hebrew word for spirit or

breath. So you are an embodied soul animated by an invisible life-breath of spirit.

The Hebrew word for soul is *nephesh*, and it's often translated into English as simply "I" or "me." The use of the English word "soul" to translate *nephesh* was an unfortunate choice because our instinctive thoughts about what a soul is have been influenced more by Greek philosophy than the Bible. It's easy to misunderstand places where the Bible talks about the soul and think it's Plato's or Aristotle's version of it. Those philosophers trained us to think of the material world we live in as an inferior shadow of a higher, immaterial reality. The implications of Greek philosophy permeate our culture today. You can hear it when people talk of the soul as if it is the "real you" trapped inside your physical existence. We have come to speak of the soul as something separate and of a higher order, inevitably leading us to put a lower value on the body. Today I hear talk about the body as something that "gets in the way" of your real, spiritual self, which exists as your soul. We have come to think of our soul as our ideal, true (and disembodied) existence that is perfected after death when we are released from this cage of flesh. This is absolutely not the picture we get in Scripture of humanity's design! And it leads us to overlook the very real ways our external and internal senses of health and wholeness are integrated.

In reality, you were formed carefully and purposefully, body and soul together, so I prefer to refer to you and me as "embodied souls." The Bible indicates that God's design for humanity is an integrated external and internal life. About the only place in our culture where I still hear the word *soul* used anywhere close to this idea is when an airplane crashes. Pilots still count the number of "souls on board," which is a

relic of an old proper English usage of the word *soul*. (That’s probably why that word was chosen in biblical translation to begin with!) If there were 137 “souls on board” when the plane went down, then there were 137 complete, valuable, precious humans lost.

If your physical flesh is not a meaningless shell inside which your *nephesh* is trapped, this means your life is fully integrated—the external way you live has everything to do with the well-being of your mind, emotions, and will.

We all experience the truth of this every single day. Whatever is happening in your mind directly affects your physicality. Your passions and emotions pulsing through your “heart” can be seen in changes of your skin color (blushing, getting red with anger, paling with worry). When I first began to teach in front of thousands of people, I felt the anxiety in my digestive system: it wasn’t unusual to make extra trips to the bathroom. I learned to eat only certain things on Sunday mornings. I also recall all the weight I lost during the era when my marriage was in trouble: I had no appetite for weeks upon weeks over my worry, sadness, and fear for our future. I can still describe the gray plaid pants that had always been too tight but started hanging loosely on my frame because of all the emotional turmoil. Your visible, external body responds as though it’s connected to your invisible, internal state—because it is. How many doctors tell their patients to reduce an intangible thing like stress in order to preserve their very tangible heart? How many eating disorder patients come to understand their struggle with their body begins in beliefs lurking in their hearts and minds? Our bodies are not separate from what happens in our mind, our will, and our emotions. You know this already from living life as a human soul. There is no doubt that

you are one created being—tangible and intangible, physical and spiritual. Our bodies and souls are inseparable in their original intent and design.

There is one very specific question that can quickly get you to a good assessment of the state of your whole soul. The answer is indicative of so many things in your life that are both visible and invisible. Much of what goes on in your heart, mind, and emotions depends on this, and it is deeply connected to the way you live your physical life every day. There's one question you have to be brave enough to ask and reflective enough to answer in this book. It's one that often indicates the overall health of you as a whole soul, and it might surprise you.

How deeply and how often do you feel lonely?

Loneliness is the cry of a soul that is made for and fed by something very specific. There is something external we all need, and its presence or absence has an impact on the overall state of our internal mind, heart, will, and emotions. When you hear and feel this deep silent cry of loneliness, it is a cry for something you need in your real, flesh and blood life. There is one aspect of your life where the visible and invisible may be most deeply intertwined.

Your relationships.

Relationships consume your mind, will, and emotions—and they are also lived out externally every single day. The state of your relationships is nearly always a fair assessment of your state as a human soul.

If you want more life from the inside out, you have to look closely at how you're doing relationships. So throughout the book you are going to look at every single one of them. I want you to think about the friendships, family relationships, and human connections—big or small, present or past—that

are affecting your life from the inside out. The design of your relational world matters more to the thriving of your life than any other single factor.

Relationships: God's Design

Genesis 1 in the Bible is where we can find the account of God creating life in all its different forms. He created varieties of plants and animals and spaces for them to thrive, grow, and reproduce. He called all his creation good. Then he made a human being, and Genesis 2 is an up-close look at this unique, final creation of life. Strangely, unlike all the other parts of creation, God wasn't completely satisfied with what he had made. This is the first time in Scripture we find the word *alone*: God declared that "it is not good for the man to be alone" (Gen. 2:18). Adam, the first human, had breath in his lungs, a beautiful place to live, a job to do, and delicious food to eat, but he existed in some kind of state that could only be remedied by another of his kind. God's displeasure with Adam's loneliness means those other things by themselves were not, according to God's original design for Adam, going to fulfill him. For the thriving, growth, satisfaction, and reproduction of human beings, the external blessings of the world were not the answer to this dissatisfactory state of being "alone."

God created us to live and thrive in the context of *relationship*. Human life is designed not just for the physical body and physical world, but for existence in a state of *connection*. God wanted Adam to feel a sense of deep belonging in the world he'd created. Beyond Genesis, even a simple observation of human life would verify that thriving depends upon connection. There was a moment at each of my four

children's births when I said something like, "It's so nice to finally meet you," because the birth of a human life is the birth of a *relationship*. Their new life depended upon a healthy bond with *me* for their thriving. Though each of my kids was uniquely made in the image of God with individual value, none of them could have survived without me—and not just physically. When I became a mom, I realized that I was being entrusted with shaping four souls that God made, inside and out. He connected us for that very purpose.

When I had kids, my bank account got smaller, my car got bigger, my vacations got less interesting, and I got used to being followed into the bathroom. However, it was motherhood that taught me firsthand the power of human connection to reshape someone's inner being. It taught me the life-shaping power of living inside a strong sense of belonging. Having a child is the most condensed example I can think of to demonstrate how we morph and change with the creation and dissolution of relationships. Even if you aren't a parent, you have one, so you know the power of being shaped and reshaped by people in your life. At the beginning of your life, the terrain of your soul was shaped by your parents' or caretakers' capacities, their degree of steadiness or anxiety, their neglect or presence, their favorite pastimes and activities, their intellectual curiosity, and their ideas of risk and caution. For better or for worse, the elements, depth, and makeup of your internal state and your external thriving depended upon your earliest connections. Your soul took on a certain "shape" because of the people around you.

Each human is created and shaped materially and immaterially by relationships. God designed human souls to be moldable, vulnerable, and permeable to the connections around us. This is not some sort of weird codependency;

it's part of our divine design so that we live with the sense that we belong to God and to others—exactly the state that God intended for Adam's life.

Unfortunately, modern Western culture has increasingly lost sight of this design. We tend to prioritize the accumulation of experiences and possessions—the very ones God knew from the beginning weren't going to satisfy us when we felt alone! We often prioritize these things over finding the greater sense of belonging *with people*. We regularly move away from long-standing friendships to pursue jobs. We cut off family connections to have more adventures or make more money. And the basic practices that connect us to others in quality, meaningful ways are being traded for more shallow habits that seem like an easier version of the “same thing.” Instead of meeting up with friends to talk face-to-face, we text. Instead of crossing the city to have dinner together, we both sit alone with our phones and post pictures of our food. Instead of meeting in person, we work on Zoom. We increasingly act out an underlying belief that the place where we live, the job we do, and the food we eat are what will satisfy our thirst for a deeper, better life. We go in search of a soul-satisfying life in these places.

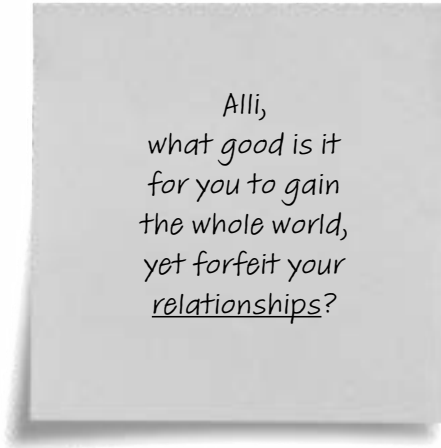
However, God looked at all those good things that he had made in the beginning and said, “That'll never be enough to satisfy a human.” *Relationships* are the only things that create fullness of life for the human soul. Money, accomplishment, travel, indulgence, physical perfection—the types of things most people spend their lives trying to obtain—will never sustain our inner life to the same extent. I wonder how our lives would change if we pursued the right set of relationships with the same intention and vigor we put into getting all of those other things. Jesus warned us to keep

an eye on our inner life first because he said it's entirely possible that we could search for life on the outside, focused exclusively on things that we think will benefit our body or material existence (think jobs and gyms and bank accounts)—and in doing so lose our very life.

I accidentally verified this truth a few summers ago. I was stepping into a new industry and onto a steep professional learning curve. I wanted to succeed. I wanted my first project to go well. By the end of the summer, I'd done just about everything I could to ensure a satisfying result—researching, meeting with consultants, creating new ideas, working extra hours—only to look around and realize that, despite my great work, I was unhappy and stressed. I felt disconnected from nearly everyone I loved. I was worse off for it. I felt like a fool for falling into what was, when I stepped back and looked, a tale as old as time. Work was going well, but I felt less alive and less satisfied from the inside out. I made a bad trade looking for a better life. Jesus warned about this kind of foolish trade-off when he said, “What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul?” (Mark 8:36–37). He thought the keeping of your soul—the essence of life in your inner being—was of crucial importance. I hope you'll soon become convinced that you, as a soul, are formed and satisfied only with layers and varieties of certain relationships

God looked at all those good things that he had made in the beginning and said, “That’ll never be enough to satisfy a human.” Relationships are the only things that create fullness of life for the human soul.

that are worth sacrificing other things to keep healthy. I've decided I need a sticky note on my bathroom mirror that says:



I am way too quick to trade them for other things. The wide variety of types and depths and aches of loneliness tells you that you were designed for a corresponding variety of types and depths of human connection. When one of those is broken or missing, you feel that nagging, hollow feeling that you're missing out on something vital to your life. The fact that we have a word for this odd internal experience of "alone-ness" is testimony to an intentional *design*.

The problem is not what God designed in Genesis 1 and 2, it's what happened in Genesis 3. Sin entered the original creation. Sin affects all our relationships, the same ones we depend on for receiving what we need to thrive. Every one of us intuitively understands the negative impact of devalued, broken, or missing human connections that weren't fully what we needed. Even today when someone asks you, "How

are you doing?” the deepest answer is almost always found in an assessment of your relational world. You—an embodied human soul—are doing about as well as your relationships are doing. The invisible impact of damaged relationships has wreaked havoc in all our lives in very real and visible ways. I know you’ve lived the truth that the less healthy your relationships are, the more you suffer from the inside out. What I want you to fully embrace is *the design underneath that truth*. God has a design for your relational world, and he left us a blueprint for it.

Even if this world of sin prevents you from ever living that design perfectly and fully, any steps you take in that direction will certainly mean a richer, more satisfying life. You, as a soul, are relational at your very core. Nothing influences your mind, will, emotions—your internal “terrain”—as formatively as the real people around you. Every person is built into a different shape because of relationships. Your thriving and wholeness as a soul are determined almost entirely by the various human bonds established and experienced throughout your life.

God intends for you to soak up and soak in all kinds of nourishment and life from him *and* from the people around you. We were all made to affect the well-being of the souls around us. God’s amazing design for human life is one that depends upon invisible *connection* of human souls to create thriving. When your connections are well-formed and growing, your relational world takes on a dense, authentic, thicker, layered quality, creating a certain “shape” on the outside that leads to health on the inside. You are about to explore that shape in blueprint form.

First, I want you to consider your current state. Be Aunt Flo for a moment. What shape are you in as a human soul?

The first way to take an honest look at that is to consider our key question.

How deeply and how often do you feel lonely?

Everybody, no matter the language, culture, or era, understands the kind of emptiness that echoes in an invisible place inside when they feel disconnected. Loneliness is a deeply shared and yet oddly individual experience. Sometimes it's as fleeting as a song I hear on a random Spotify playlist, and other times it's a stubborn presence that won't leave no matter where I go. I have felt loneliness as a passing ache for someone who used to be closer, or as a wave that rolls in as soon as I drive to a certain spot. In some seasons of life it has felt like a hopeless sadness constantly whispering that "I don't have any real friends" or "No one really knows me." Today I felt a little stab of it as I drove home after a run. A sudden sense of loneliness came over me at the thought of my firstborn leaving for college in a few months. Even when he's standing in front of me, I miss him already. Loneliness can take on all these different forms because we are complex, designed souls that influence one another's thriving. We don't need just physical health but also specific kinds of relationships for flourishing life as a human soul. Because we are one whole being created with connection from the inside out, our internal experience of loneliness is deeply connected to the design of our relationships.

We need a wake-up call to remember how God designed true, rich human connection—and return to a pursuit of what is good for human souls. I have often been mistaken in what would bring me the fulfillment I long for. I have pushed away relationships for the sake of work. I have invested in the wrong relationships for the wrong reasons. I have taken too much or too little from others. I have avoided

some relationships altogether because reconciliation is difficult. I've spent too much time worried about people who exist inside my devices but will never stand in front of me. I have suffered the outcome of all that in various kinds of loneliness because I never knew that God left me a blueprint for the life of my soul.

I found it in the relationships of Jesus.

The Relationships of Jesus

I always assumed that Jesus was lonely in the same ways that I am, but now I believe something a little different. He certainly knew pain and suffering in relationships, but the idea of *loneliness* in his life requires some nuance. Jesus certainly felt relational pain. He was rejected and misunderstood by others. He was betrayed and disobeyed by people. He sometimes had to stay by himself or avoid cities and places where he was threatened and unwelcome. There were certainly times he was alone—by necessity, mission, or choice. He was also alone in that he was a singular type of man in all of human history: the only begotten Son of God, made flesh.

So, yes, Jesus did experience a variety of ways he was unique or alone. However, I cannot find the words in Scripture to defend the idea that Jesus lived in the sort of loneliness that many of us do today—detached from the very essence of human life and deeply deprived of the need for connection. The one time I can find it is on the cross, the very lowest moment of his life. While we will never identify with the depth of physical and spiritual agony of that event, many people resonate with what Jesus cried out at his soul's most painful moment. He used David's words from Psalm 22:1, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Over

and above the physical pain, those words seem to express a feeling of abandonment and loneliness that many of us feel deep inside and live with every day.

Jesus walked his days on earth very differently. He lived in deep connection to his Father, which led him to be a relationally well-formed man. Despite the pain he experienced in relationships, his soul was in good shape because he knew how to live life deeply and richly. He took seriously his connection with God and with other people. Jesus developed five realms of relationships in his earthly life. He created and maintained a **core**, **circle**, **comrades**, **community**, and **crowd**. Through this ecosystem of connection, he lived a thriving human life. Even Jesus needed all these relationships because he was not only fully God but fully man, living out the perfect design for human life. He developed best friends, worked alongside his disciples, received resources from others, and was built up by comrades on the same mission. He somehow managed to communicate deep love and commitment to the Jewish people while always welcoming outsiders and strangers in the crowds around him. He never once sinned. He always loved perfectly. He stayed on the mission his Father gave him. I'm tired just thinking about trying to do all this, let alone actually knowing how, when, and where to give and receive in all these different ways.

I always feel so limited in my relational capacity. This week I felt like a lousy friend when I had to cancel margaritas because of a back-to-school night. Last week I invested in professional relationships at a conference, and I missed things happening in my husband's life three time zones away. The time and resources it takes to be richly present to some always seems to shortchange others. Sometimes I'm okay with the trade-offs and priority calls I make, but other times

I second-guess myself or struggle with classic mom guilt, feeling like I never manage to give all four kids what they need at the same time. I feel frustratingly limited in who I can connect with in a twenty-four-hour day in one location. I make the wrong call or let someone down much more often than I wish. I never seem to master the art of holding on to “my people” and welcoming new ones with the same intentionality; when I foster some connections, other ones seem to suffer.

Jesus was limited in the same basic human ways we are. He lived within the confines of twenty-four-hour days, needed to get and prepare food, had to work and sleep, *and* needed to maintain the health of his invisible mind, heart, will, and emotions—which meant attending well to his relationships. Jesus was God, but a God who chose to empty himself of his limitless nature. Read that again: *Jesus emptied himself of his limitless nature* to come and embrace constraints like the ones you have. He *took on needs* he didn’t previously have in his heavenly dwelling as the eternal Son of God. Jesus agreed to face competing requests for his time and a family who made demands and misunderstood him. He had to walk from place to place at about three miles per hour instead of enjoying the omnipresence previously available to him. Jesus lived a human life with many places he couldn’t be and many people he couldn’t see all at once. Do those kinds of limitations sound familiar?

However, Jesus also maintained the fullness of his soul through well-developed, real, deep relationships. He never made the wrong trades when it came to tasks versus people. He never let the wrong people in. He grew in the wisdom and understanding of how his Father designed relationships to work so his human soul was deeply satisfied. The richness of

his inner life began with a deep connection to his Father, but it flourished because he lived fully within his Father's holistic design for humanity. That design necessitated giving and receiving through *relationships* what is needed for a thriving life. Jesus didn't circumvent that design because he was fully God; he lived squarely within it because he was fully man.

Jesus could do this because his everyday relational world had a *design*. Far from haphazard, Jesus had five critical types of relationships. The way he attended to them was out of an overflow from his center of connection to God, which allowed him to form, prioritize, and love all his human relationships in just the right way. (Something I can never manage to do.) Jesus's life was more beautiful, more intentional, and much less lonely than our lives feel. In each of his five realms of relationship, God provided for his needs to grow in wisdom, be attached and included, experience feeling truly known, and engage in the adventure and unscripted moments of human life. Jesus lived these just as we need to. Each of the five types of relationships included certain types of people who made his life rich and fruitful and authentically human. Each of the five types also had identifiable characteristics: specific natures of interaction, certain activities, and notable boundaries around time, intimacy, activity, or conversation. We desperately need this wisdom because Jesus lived fulfilled in a way that most of us do not.

As we search the relationships of Jesus together in each chapter, I hope you'll consider what these types of relationships look like for you, and whether Jesus may have been on to something in how he lived and related to others. I want you to blend this ancient wisdom with your modern world to see how you might be able to reshape your external relationships and as a result bring internal life to you as a soul. Some of the

patterns we have learned from our culture today are failing us. Whenever you find a difference in how you think of people or relate to others versus how Jesus did (because you will), I believe you will also find the origin of your lonely moments—whether brief and fleeting or constant and dark. The life of Jesus gives hope for something beyond loneliness.

When I sat feeling lonely at the party I described in the introduction, I didn't have words to express that my sense of loneliness was coming from having chosen the wrong comrades. Early in college, despite being a Christian, I had rejected the gatherings of Campus Crusade for Christ (now called Cru), which was the main source for Christian friendships and fun on my campus. I told myself I just didn't vibe with them, and I joined a sorority instead. The party I described happened at the very end of my senior year. I was engaged to be married and I had friends. However, I was struggling with a kind of loneliness that a fiancé and friends do not address: a sense that I had attached myself to entirely the wrong group of people. We shared no mission. We shared no common goals. I had no interest in pursuing the objectives of sorority life any of the years I was in it. Despite meeting some lovely women, I had no true comrades, no one who fully shared my life direction, no one who knew my faith, no one who could fight alongside me toward any kind of kingdom mission. It was a costly mistake. Almost four years later, not only had my faith withered terribly, but I could not shake the sense that these people—no matter how nice—were not *my* people. I'd chosen the wrong comrades, and I felt alone.

You can't shake off that kind of loneliness. Now I see that. Now I understand the feelings I had that night. I could only walk away from the party in relief that it was the last of its kind. I had chosen badly for my network of relationships

in college, and it cost me a piece of my soul. The potential friendships I rejected as a freshman took years to rebuild another way. I felt a lot more of the same kind of loneliness, but slowly God began to help me fix this aspect of loneliness in my life when I started to meet new people in my new city after graduation. God restored comrades to me in an almost laughable way. I actually met and became friends with a handful of people at my new church in Cincinnati, Ohio, who had been in Cru at my college during the very years I rejected that avenue of relationship. I felt God wink at me as though he were saying, “No worries. I brought you back to the right ones.” The way God redesigned that realm of relationship in my life still makes me laugh.

You’re about to take a hard look at your relational world and begin a relationship redesign inspired by the life of Jesus. God wants to develop, celebrate, or repair five different kinds of relationships in your life. Your inner self is being shaped by the state of them in your life today, and he wants more for you! These five are a unique blend of connections in which your whole soul—your very life—can truly thrive. I have spent plenty of hours looking in the mirror, wishing one of my body parts was a different shape, but I have never given much thought to what has shaped and formed me as a soul. Be Aunt Flo. Look hard. Ask questions. Be honest about what is real and not real. Let yourself feel and remember the loneliness. You may be surprised to see that God has actual, practical help to offer. There might be some relationships you need to push further out, some you need to double-down on, and others you simply need to name and clarify.

The Hebrew word *yakhid*, translated “lonely” (“only, singular”), comes from the root word *yakhad*, which is translated “to be united or joined.” The word *lonely* is rooted in

precisely the opposite of loneliness! *Yakhad* is the essence of a unified, joined *community that is one*, and *yakhid* is the individual who experiences a world of one—a world without the oneness of connection. As you go about this redesign, I want you to ask yourself, “Am I *yakhid* or *yakhad* in this realm of relationship?” As you examine your relationships closely, maybe you will find places you are *yakhad*—thriving in thick connections with others—and some places you are *yakhid* and your relational ties are too thin. These are bound to be the places in your life where you experience your own unique recipe of loneliness. Whatever you find to remodel, there is a God who can replace what’s been missing, restore what’s been wasted, and fix what’s been broken.

Spend some time right now thinking of all the relationships in your life. Every single one. Do a good job, because you’re going to use this later. Using your phone, social media, memory, or pictures, write down as many names as possible, in no particular order. Come back and add more as they pop into your head. After that, move on to a deep dive with me into each type of relationship in the life of Jesus. You’re going to consider the blueprint of his life overlaid on your own. I pray you will see and follow the Lord into his unique, life-giving, redesigned shape of *you*: an integrated human soul.

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