Did you know that as a child of God, you have a very special relationship, a powerful connection with other people, particularly Christians?

The apostle Paul speaks about and explains this in his first letter to the church in Corinth, saying, “For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ.”

Without getting too much into it, the basic understanding of this verse is that through and in Christ, we are members of one spiritual family and we belong to one another together. This means I can’t exist without you; I can’t live alone. We are all interconnected, interdependent to each other, and, cut off from you, I can’t survive alone.

So, even if you don’t agree with me, or like me, even if you want to cancel me, at the end of the day, you can’t live without me—or I without you. We are stuck together.

Isn’t this nice? But the challenge is that many of us may think or have been taught that we can make it on our own, that happiness is the result of independence, and that if I am financially independent, if I am relationally independent, if I am independent in every way, then I will be the happiest. And yet, we have never had more unhappy people.

The truth is, life fulfillment does not come from being independent as in isolated, living a life with all the barriers up and all the masks on (no pun intended), and keeping people at an arm’s distance. That is not the way to be happy. Happiness comes from community, from our ability and inclination to join others and let others join us in this short life journey.

Mother Theresa said, “Loneliness and the feeling of being unwanted is the most terrible poverty.”

However, if we are honest, we can confess that this sounds great, but it is not always easy nor practical. I am sure you had had moments when you thought, “I don’t need these people,” or “I don’t need his or her friendship,” or “I am better alone, on my own.” I am not going to argue why you felt like that; your reasons may have been warranted. Perhaps, you needed that space for your own physical, emotional, and mental health. Putting that aside, I am looking at the bigger and general picture here, where even as we might say we don’t need any friends, family, or just people in general, the truth is we do need each other. As much as others may hurt us, we can neither be healed without others.

Here is what I have learned over the years (and keep in mind this comes from someone that has had all kinds of experiences with people like being liked, disliked, trusted, betrayed, cheered up, chased down, and the list goes on): healthy relationships make life enjoyable more than anything else. The ability and quality to relate to others in healthy ways is the foundation for the best life you can ever imagine. This is not about a rosy life experience but managing our relationships in a way that builds up people rather than tears them down.

This is why it makes sense that the Bible ranks healthy relationships as the most important thing in life. For example, a Jewish religious expert asked Jesus,

“Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?” He said to him, “‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.” Matthew 22:36-40

Jesus is teaching that a loving relationship with God is of first importance; but loving, healthy relationships with others go hand-in-hand. Clearly, the Bible is all about these two important relationships.

From the book of Genesis when God created people to be in a relationship with him and each other (Adam and Eve); the giving of the ten commandments (which are about building and maintaining healthy community relationships with God and neighbors); to all the teachings of Jesus regarding loving one another, forgiving one another, serving and taking care of one another.

However, we know that once relationships got hurt and broken, people got hurt. When Adam and Eve betrayed God, their relationship with him was interrupted, and they lost everything they had. Their children ended up fighting, and one killed the other. From there, every human relationship has repeated similar behaviors that continue to hurt us. But God has never abandoned us but has continued to reach out to us to heal and bring us back into healthy relationships with him and each other.

But, what does it mean to have this relationship and connection with one another, to love one another? Is it an emotion of the heart, an act of service, a force of the will? Can we truly define how we relate to each other in loving ways—even we don’t like one another very much?

We think so often in simple terms in regard to love: “I like you, therefore, I love you,” “I love you because you are nice to me.” But real love goes much deeper. Love strengthens the weak, helps those in need, seeks to live in peace with all people and holds us accountable. Love means carrying each other burdens, admonishing and instructing, and showing compassion. It means encouraging one another to good deeds, confessing and forgiving, building and maintaining trust, being of one mind no matter our differences. Love means accepting others for who they are and allowing ourselves to be changed in the process.

So, indeed, love holds us together grafted by faith into the one true Christ, whose example compels us to love one another.

A well-known story in the Bible gives us a powerful example of the importance of seeking healthy relationships with others, particularly those that have meant to harm us.

It is the story of Joseph, son of Jacob, and his brothers that first plotted to kill him but settled to sell him as a slave to get rid of him. They did this because they were jealous of him. After years passed, they met again, but this time Joseph was not a slave anymore but the second most powerful man in the land of Egypt.

What if Joseph had sought revenge against his brothers? After all, he was the most powerful man in Egypt after Pharaoh—he could do whatever he wanted. In his own words, “God has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt.” (Genesis 45:8)

What would the implications have been if Joseph had killed his brothers out of revenge? Think about it for a moment. They were the children of Jacob, who was the son of Isaac, who was the son of Abraham to whom God promised to make of his children a great nation to bless all the families of the earth.

So, Joseph and his brothers were the people that would become the nation of Israel. If Joseph had taken revenge, he would have hindered the plan and blessing God had promised to Abraham and his descendants of whom he was a part. There wouldn’t be the “twelve tribes of Israel” that we read about in the Hebrew Scriptures. As you can see, hate, revenge, and the likes ultimately are self-destructive.

But Joseph didn’t take out his brothers. He could easily have said, “I don’t need them; they are dead to me.” He did not take “an eye for an eye” or retaliate “anger with anger” or “fear with fear.” His brothers treated him like an enemy, but he did not treat them like so. Even when Joseph’s brothers treated and considered him as an enemy, and despised and hated him; and even when they talked about him behind his back plotting against him and selling him into slavery, he said to them, “I am your brother.” (Genesis 55:4) Then, he went ahead to hugged and kissed them.

This act of love is what restored the whole family, their relationships and connection, back to life and peace with themselves and each other.

Because of this act of compassion and grace, God’s plans continued to be accomplished. God was honored by Joseph’s actions, and Joseph and his family were established forever as the people of the promise.

I believe that by studying stories like this one and learning about God’s love and human behavior, that as much as we want to make it on our own, we can’t live without each other. You see, we know about Joseph because he didn’t miss the opportunity to re-establish his relationship and connection with his family. It is not because he was powerful or wealthy that we know about him, but because, in the end, he was part of a broader community and story.

What does all this mean to us? As I said in the beginning, we can’t exist without each other; we can’t live alone. We are all interconnected, interdependent to each other, and, cut off from one another, we can’t survive alone.

I know how difficult this is sometimes when you have been hurt and there may not be a likely possibility of amending relationships, but let that not be your choice. Often what holds us back is not what other people do against us but what we do to ourselves. Had Joseph remained bitter and resentful, seeking vengeance at the first opportunity, he would have never become what he did become. His mind would have been so overwhelmed and consumed by anger and fears that he would have missed the opportunities to be wise, smart, brave, and such a blessed man. In the same way, our best life can only happen in community, with healthy relationships and connections with others.

I know that forgiveness sometimes happens right away and other times takes years, perhaps even a lifetime, but the most important thing is that it happens before the end. There is no greater way to honor God than to do unto others as God does unto us.

My friends, don’t stay alone, don’t cut people off from your life. As you look at yourself like in a mirror, ask the questions: Who is missing?