

There once was a man who lived and worked around people, but he felt all alone. He grew up in a family where he learned to keep things to himself. He got to be pretty good at stuffing his feelings and pretending everything was okay. But then he got stuck in one of those bad seasons of life where everything seemed to go wrong, and he didn't know which way to turn. The problems weren't just his bad circumstances. Although there were some caring people in his life who could help and support him, he wasn't in touch with his feelings. He didn't know how to express his emotions, and he wasn't very good at trusting people.

- **So what happens to people like this?**
- **How do you “unlearn” unhealthy patterns that you developed when you were younger?**
- **Have you ever met someone who helped you build trust and learn how to express your emotions?**

Although we may not be highly skilled at trusting and confiding in people around us, God designed us to live and work and eat and play and communicate with the people He's placed in our lives. When we are surrounded by people who are unhealthy, God wants to remind us that our life and strength comes from Him. Sometimes unhealthy people teach us through their negative role modeling **how not to be**. God also places us in these contexts to develop our character and to make a difference in the lives of hurting people. If you don't spend much of your time around people who are struggling and hurting, then you're not living like Jesus. You may have built walls and sanitized your life so much that you are not making any difference in your world.

In order to live in community, you have to be around people, and you have to have some safe, healthier people who will help share your burdens and support you in good and bad times. But in order to find friends like that, you have to become that kind of a friend to others. You must learn to get beyond yourself and be there for others. The interesting thing to discover when you get close enough to know and respond to people around you is this: **We all have the same needs, and we all have problems**. The colors and flavors of the problems may vary. But we all have needs. Emotional needs. Spiritual needs. Relationship needs. Financial needs. Physical needs. Vocational needs...Once you begin dropping your guard, sharing your problems, and sharing your needs, you will discover you are not alone. You will find people who care and people who do not care. You will find people who give and people who take. People who energize you and people who wear you out. People who help and people who hurt. People who make time and room to help and people who have no time and room to help. And that's why you need a few safe and healthier friends who will help you navigate the pathway as you are learning to live in community with God and His people. Just because God made all people in His good image doesn't mean that all people are following God and becoming more like our Creator.

Living in community doesn't just happen. Responding to one another's thoughts, dreams, desires, problems, and needs will always take time. Living in connected relationships is not convenient, but it's necessary. The costs of giving and serving and loving outweigh the costs of isolation, loneliness, despair, and disconnectedness. So let's talk about it...

- **What does it mean to you to live in community?**
- **Who do you live in community with? How do you do it?**
- **If someone watched us today, would they say we are friends living in community?**
- **What kind of community would you like to create together?**
- **What changes can we make that will help us live in community?**