

First Light

A recent study conducted by the Survey Center on American Life indicated that Americans are suffering from a shortage of friendships. It indicated that specifically men in America are experiencing the most isolation and loneliness of all. According to the Center, the workplace is a source of the “**friendship recession**”, as Americans work longer hours, switch jobs more often and have less actual workplace attendance. The low rate of friendships appears to be rooted in “lower religious involvement, lower marriage rates and greater geographic mobility.”

Without a doubt, the ripple effects of the past year continue to be recognized. What started with hand sanitizing and masking, became isolation, quarantine and social distancing, creating the friendship vacuum. Aside from the sobering health impact that the COVID-19 virus has made, the emotional and spiritual impact have been overwhelming as well. Anxiety, worry and fear have become common behavioral problems of school-agers to senior citizens and increasingly requiring professional counseling to manage. As the pandemic grew, it had the opposite effect on the civil community of society, creating hermitized masses and distanced relationships, saved only by an internet connection and a cold device to transmit voice and images as the next best thing to being there. Relationships have indeed suffered.

Solomon, in all his wisdom makes clear statements regarding the importance of these relationships and our need to have close friendships.

Proverbs 27:17 says:

7 As iron sharpens iron,
so one person sharpens another.

In Ecclesiastes 4:9-12, he says this:

9 Two are better than one,
because they have a good return for their labor:

10 If either of them falls down,
one can help the other up.

But pity anyone who falls
and has no one to help them up.

11 Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm.
But how can one keep warm alone?

12 Though one may be overpowered,
two can defend themselves.

A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.

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As the grip of the pandemic begins to loosen some, it is a valuable time to rekindle those relationships which may have lost touch lately. As the study indicated, men tend to sequester themselves into work and other interests which may be more isolating. Perhaps this is the right time to build your own Iron Coffee group - to make a few phone calls and ask a few friends to meet every few weeks to talk, laugh, and pray for one another and break the chain of loneliness that has been strung for many months. Having some time in a small group to enjoy coffee and Bible study can make the roughest week much more manageable. Re-engaging in worship time with your church family is a positive way to re-establish those friendships which have been on hold and to refresh your faith in God. Consider Solomon's admonition for us to bind together and be stronger than we can be by ourselves - A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.