

# Senior Pastor

By Brandon Lemons, Senior Pastor

## How Connected Are You?

Back in October of 1993, in the town of Worcester, Massachusetts, police found an elderly woman dead on her kitchen floor. This was no ordinary discovery—she had been dead four years! Police speculated she died at the age of seventy-three of natural causes.

How can someone be so isolated that no one even notices when she dies? Well, this woman didn't have a close relationship with her family, and she isolated herself from others. One friend from the past said, "She didn't want anyone bothering her at all. I guess she got her wish, but it's awfully sad."<sup>1</sup>



While this story is a bit extreme, it's a good reminder of what happens if we aren't connected with others. While I doubt that anyone at Friedens could end up in the exact same situation as this woman in Massachusetts, I am concerned about how easy it is for us as American Christians to live disconnected lives, to be around other people but have no one who truly knows us and cares about us.

## Our Disconnected Society

America has been called "The Loneliest Nation on Earth."<sup>2</sup> Superficiality in our relationships can lead to loneliness, even when we're in the presence of many people. Let me point out three of the root causes of this disconnection and superficiality.

1. We live "compartmentalized" lives. The various aspects of an American's life tend to be divided into "compartments" that rarely interact with each other, such as: work, church, recreation, neighborhood, etc. When people only know us in one aspect of our life, it is difficult for people to really know us.



2. We're too busy. We are moving so quickly from one task to the next that we don't have a chance to slow down to connect with others or even to



be honest with ourselves. It's been said that "if the devil can't make you bad, he'll make you busy." Authentic connection takes time.

3. We're too afraid. People often fear rejection if others see who they really are. It feels easier and safer to put on a "happy face" and pretend everything's "fine" than to be honest about what's really happening in our lives.



## Authentic, Biblical Community

Without authentic connections with other Christians, we cannot be all that God has called us to be, individually or as a church (see John 13:34; Rom. 12:9-16; Gal. 6:2; Heb. 10:24-25; James 5:16). Even worse, lack of authentic community can cause us to suffer from a similar fate as the woman in Massachusetts, though with a slight twist. We may be struggling spiritually, emotionally, financially, etc, but no one really knows. Then, when the truth comes out, it's too late: a marriage has already crumbled; a heart has hardened toward God; an addiction has formed; disillusionment has set in.

Friedens has been known as a "friendly church." I want to challenge us to go deeper than mere friendliness. We are in deep need of authentically sharing life together—the ups and the downs, the good parts and the ugly parts. A core aspect of Friedens' mission is "connecting with one another authentically." Are we courageous and intentional enough to live this out?

Two of the key ingredients for developing authentic, biblical community are: intentionality and the Gospel. Intentionality is necessary due to our busyness and passivity. And the Gospel has the power to remove our fear of vulnerability. According to the Gospel, we are a lot more sinful than we ever dared believe, so our sin shouldn't surprise us or others. Yet the Gospel also proclaims that God loves us a lot more than we ever dared hope, and this frees us to experience grace from God and from others.<sup>3</sup>

Are you ready for deeper connections with other Christians? A great step is that if you don't currently gather regularly with a group of Christians for prayer, study, and sharing life together, start now. LifeGroups are a great way to seek authentic, life-giving biblical community. Remember, "as iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another" (Pr. 27:17). But this only happens on the deepest levels when there is authentic connection.

<sup>1</sup> "Woman's Body Is Found in Kitchen—4 Years after Dying," *Chicago Tribune*, October 27, 1993

<sup>2</sup> Randy Frazee in *The Connecting Church*, p. 23

<sup>3</sup> Alan Kraft in *Good News for Those Trying Harder*, p. 91