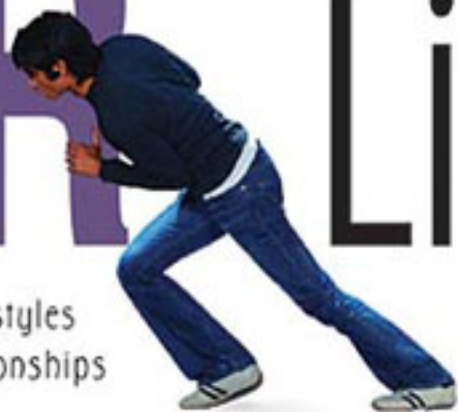


MAKING ROOM FOR Life

Trading Chaotic Lifestyles
for Connected Relationships



RANDY FRAZEE

Praise for *Making Room for Life*

I read *Making Room for Life* sandwiched in the middle seat of a crowded airplane. By the time I finished part 2 (“The Solution: Restructuring Our Relationships and Time”), I noticed that my breathing patterns had become deeper and more relaxed. *Making Room for Life* is the “Mirror of Erised” for life and community. For all those “Harried Potters” out there—take heed.

JOSEPH R. MYERS,
author of *The Search to Belong:
Rethinking Intimacy, Community,
and Small Groups*

Randy Frazee’s *Making Room for Life* is the right book at the right time for a frazzled, frantic, and unfulfilled populace. It is a book of sound practical advice from a wise pastor who knows people’s needs. The author urges readers to join a small group of fellow seekers, in which lives can be shared at a deep level and the life-transforming discovery made that God is nearer and dearer to us than we can possibly imagine.

GEORGE GALLUP JR.,
chairman, The George H. Gallup
International Institute

I’m so excited you picked up this book. In a time when our hectic daily schedules often squeeze the living out of life, *Making Room for Life* is a godsend. Connection and community are essential to healthy living—not just for us, but for our kids as well. Randy Frazee offers a vision of a life rich in relationships and meaning. Best of all, he provides clear steps for making this vision a reality. Life is a precious gift, so make room for it!

KEN BLANCHARD,
coauthor of *The One Minute
Manager*® and *Servant Leader*

“I want to simplify my life, but simplifying is way too complicated!” If that’s how you feel, you need to read *Making Room for Life*. If you feel our modern Western pace of living is inhospitable to human life, if you’re fed up with what Randy Frazee calls “the severe fragmentation and discontinuity of the American lifestyle,” if you have a sneaking suspicion that modern “conveniences” are giving you more time to enjoy life less, then cancel an appointment immediately and let Randy help you discover life without breathlessness.

BRIAN MCLAREN,
pastor (crcc.org),
author, fellow in emergent
(emergentvillage.com)

This practical book is a timely word for a complex culture. Randy’s concept of reorganizing our time in a way that flows with creation is powerful and challenging. I highly recommend that you read this work, if you have the time! That’s the point!

DAVID A. ANDERSON, D.Phil.,
pastor, Bridgeway Community Church

Imagine if we actually *did* what Randy suggests. [Sigh] It’s doubtful we will—but it would be revolutionary!

MARK OESTREICHER,
president, Youth Specialties;
publisher, emergentYS resources
for emerging church leaders

Randy Frazee has made a significant contribution to one of the most important conversations among thoughtful Christians today: “How do we live lives in harmony with God in the context of our world?”

DOUG PAGITT,
pastor, Solomon’s Porch

MAKING ROOM FOR

Life

Trading Chaotic Lifestyles
for Connected Relationships



RANDY FRAZEE

ZONDERVAN™

GRAND RAPIDS, MICHIGAN 49530 USA



Making Room for Life

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*To Rozanne,
my wife and best friend:
my personal journey to make room
for life has been driven by a passion
to spend more time with you*

Contents

Acknowledgments	9
Introduction	11

Part 1: The Problem: Squeezing Living Out of Life

Chapter 1. Crowded Loneliness	15
<i>Managing Too Many Worlds</i>	
Chapter 2. The Connection Requirement	27
<i>Created for Community</i>	

Part 2: The Solution: Restructuring Our Relationships and Time

Chapter 3. The Secret of the Bedouin Shepherd	39
<i>The Solution Is Not More of the Same</i>	
Chapter 4. The Circle of Life	45
<i>Restructuring Our Relationships</i>	
Chapter 5. The Hebrew Day Planner	59
<i>Restructuring Our Time</i>	

Part 3: The Obstacles: Overcoming Bad Habits and Myths about Raising Children

Chapter 6. Getting Life Out of Balance	71
<i>The Need for Boundaries</i>	
Chapter 7. Childhood: An Endangered Species	87
<i>How Our Lifestyles Affect Our Children</i>	
Chapter 8. The Lost Art of Play.	95
<i>Seven Ways Our Children Are Losing</i>	

Part 4: The How-To's: Practical Steps to Making Room for Life

Chapter 9. Ten Principles of Productivity	111
<i>Getting Work Done at Work</i>	
Chapter 10. Discovering the Convivium	127
<i>The Importance of Sharing a Meal</i>	
Chapter 11. The First Church of the Neighborhood	143
<i>Bringing Church Home</i>	
Chapter 12. Life Busters Part 1	157
<i>Dealing with Homework and Sports</i>	
Chapter 13. Life Busters Part 2	167
<i>Dealing with the Pressures of Work</i>	
Afterword: You Can Do It!	181
Appendix: A Word to Church Leaders	185
Notes	189

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Making Room for Life has been a great joy to write. But it has been more than a writing project. It has become a way of life for my family and me. The principal result of this vision is connected relationships—with God and with others. So I want to thank my God for connecting with me through Jesus Christ thirty years ago. I also want to thank God for the many significant people he has brought into my life to encourage me and stand by me.

To my wife, Rozanne, I dedicate this book. To my four children—Jennifer, David, Stephen, and Austin—I thank God daily that he has put you in the room with me. We have experienced such a rich life together. I pray for many more years together. I can't forget my connection with my wife's parents, Al and Joan Bitonti, and my mother and father, Ruth Ann and Ralph Frazee, as well as with our siblings and their families—Don, Teresa, Jo Ann, Mike, Suzanne, and Joi.

So much of what I have learned about making room for life has been learned with the precious families who live in my neighborhood and a little ways down the street—the Ballows, Huffmans, Wellses, Hortons, Lawrences, Sanderses, McNultys, Sparkses, Zangs, Hollandsworths, Vossens, and Wades. May our tribe increase and our relationships deepen even more.

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Lynch, Gregg Williams, Mike Phifer, Steve Newby, and Larry Ivey—you have stood up for me and believed in this vision. Thank you. To the entire staff at Pantego Bible Church—you are the ones who carry the vision to so many others; your tenacity, vision, and work ethic inspire me. To my senior leadership team—Kevin Walker, Pam Forbes, Ira Orr, Scott Burks, and Tom Bulick—thank you for sharing this exciting vision with me, along with helping to carry the burden of making it happen in the lives of the people God has given us to shepherd. And, of course, to the congregation of Pantego Bible Church—your innovative spirit has made our journey possible.

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Making Room for Life is a book that has enlisted many people to help make it a reality. Rozanne, my wife, was my faithful reader and editor before the manuscript went to Zondervan. The best thoughts in the book are hers. I just take credit for them. This is book number three that Rita Ballow has typed and cared for like a mother hen. I deeply appreciate your faithfulness to help me over the last fifteen years, Rita. To Maria Nutt, my personal assistant: may God continue to give you grace, mercy, wisdom, and strength as you try to manage my life and ministry. It is an impossible job, but somehow you manage to pull it off.

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Introduction

If you are reading these words, there's a good chance you have some interest in "making room for life." What a concept. A book about the most basic aspect of living—LIFE! As crazy as it may sound, most people I know are ready for it.

What comes to your mind when you see the words "making room for life"? I'll tell you what it means to me, and you tell me whether we're on the same page.

- I envision a life that is not as hectic. We always seem to be on our way to the next place, never really arriving at a destination.
- I envision a life with either more money or less expenses. (I strongly suspect it's less expenses.)
- I envision a life with less time in the car and more time for walks. Can this ever become a reality?
- I envision a life where there is a time for work and a time for play. I love to work, but I just want it to keep from getting offside. I want to play more, but I think after all these years I've forgotten how.
- I envision a life with less fast food in the car and more spreads of home cooking with family and friends. Shoving burritos in our mouths while driving can't be what God had in mind for us. We have lost the beautiful art of sharing a meal together. I want to regain that art.
- I envision a life of less accumulation and more conversation. I already have way too many manuals on how to care for the stuff I bought. Plus, people

have to be more interesting than things. I don't think most of us really know for sure.

My list goes on and on, and I'm sure yours does, too. We are an advanced people with vast resources. We've invented speed and time-saving technology that couldn't be fathomed a hundred years ago. We have more discretionary money than any people in history, though we usually spend it all before it even comes in. We have the freedom to choose like no other people in any other time. With all this going for us, why does it feel as though we've gone backward instead of forward in our quest for a quality life? And how can we do something about it? That's the purpose of this book. It is for those who say, "That's enough!" "I've had it!" "Things are going to be different!"

If this describes you, then you're going to enjoy the pages that follow. We'll start off by unveiling the problem. What causes such a sophisticated people to squeeze living out of life? Once the problem has been diagnosed, we'll move quickly to solutions. How can we restructure our relationships and our time so that we can get at the heart of living? We'll then turn our attention to overcoming the obstacles that threaten our success. We'll wrap up with five practical chapters on the how-to's of making this vision a reality in our lives.

At the end of each chapter you'll be asked to write out your thoughts about what you've read and then to identify one or more action steps to consider as you tailor your own adventure in making room for life. This is important for two reasons. First, this is a journey that begins with baby steps. Don't be discouraged by this. Each step you choose to take will reap great rewards. The baby steps will build momentum and courage for the steps ahead. Second, the ideas presented here are not an "all or nothing" proposition. There may be things that you don't like or that don't make sense for you, given your circumstances. Take what makes sense, and leave the rest alone.

My heart is pounding with excitement as I envision you reading what follows. This has been an exciting and rich experience for my family and me over the last ten years. We are closer than ever to the vision described above. While your list may look a bit different, I have a passion to see you make progress. If you get a chance, let me know your thoughts (e-mail me at response@makingroomforlife.com).

THE PROBLEM: Squeezing Living Out of Life

Simply put, many of us have squeezed living out of life. We don't have the time to soak in life and deep friendships. We're always running around trying to get to the next event. This presents at least two major problems. First, our busy lifestyles stimulate a toxic disease called *crowded loneliness*. But there's an even deeper problem. In our original design we were created with a *connection requirement*. If this requirement is not met, we will die.

Crowded Loneliness

Managing Too Many Worlds

Consider the average day of a typical middle-class family in America. The family rises at 6:00 A.M. Everyone fends for himself or herself for breakfast. Dad heads out at 6:45 to beat the 7:00 traffic. His normal commute without excessive traffic is forty-five minutes. Mom and the two children are out the door by 7:15 (usually someone is a little cranky). Mom drops her elementary-age sons off at school by 7:40. Twenty minutes later she arrives at her workplace.

At 3:30 P.M. the children are done with school and enter an after-school program. Mom skips lunch so she can rush out of the office to pick the kids up by 5:00. She arrives home at 5:30. Fifteen minutes later one son has baseball practice. She gets both kids in the car and rushes to make it to the practice field on time. The other son has a game at 8:00. She calls her husband on the cell phone while taking her son to baseball



practice to make sure he can grab the second child at the field and get him to his game by 7:30.

Dad leaves the office at 6:00 P.M., unsuccessful in his efforts to make it through his to-do list. Traffic is now an issue. The forty-five-minute commute stretches now into an hour and fifteen minutes. He arrives at the practice field at 7:15 with all the signs of road stress. He kisses his wife, waves to his son in center field, whooshes the second son into his SUV (a mere \$700 a month), and heads to the game field about fifteen minutes away. Son #1 finishes practice at 7:30, and he and Mom head for home. On the way they stop at Taco Bell for dinner. They arrive home at 8:00. The boy turns to the video games while Mom checks the e-mail.

Meantime, the baseball game gets started a little late and doesn't end until 9:45 P.M. Dad is still in his business casual clothes, but he does appreciate the forced break to watch his son play ball. On their way home they make a quick stop at the McDonald's drive-in window. They arrive home at 10:30. Once in the house, son #2 reveals that he hasn't finished studying for the history test he's supposed to take tomorrow.

After forty-five minutes of shoving facts into her son's short-term memory while he inhales a McDonald's "Happy" Meal, Mom sends him to bed. It is now 11:15 P.M. Time for bed. Mom and Dad flop into bed dead tired. They watch a little television; exchange a few words—mostly action items for the next day—and then lights go out. Mom falls asleep as soon as the lights are out. Dad, on the other hand, doesn't. He lies there thinking about all the things that must be done. He knows he needs to sleep, so he gets up and swallows a sleeping pill. It seems to be the only way he can get a good night's sleep lately. It bothers him a little, but he doesn't see any alternative. Tomorrow promises more of the same. Things seem a little harried and out of hand, but the following assumptions keep the family from making any changes:

- Everyone lives this way.

- This is a privileged life that can only be maintained with hard work and discretionary money.
- Things will even out soon. This is just a temporary season of busyness.

Maybe this mirrors your life. The activities may be different, but the movement and noise are the same. The initial thought is that the more financial resources you have, the more likely you are to have a stress-free, relaxing life. In reality, though, studies show that with increased resources comes increased complexity, not simplicity. If they aren't especially careful, the ones who have more actually have more with which to destroy themselves.

Maybe you can relate to the cartoon caption below. Can you think of how many times you've made a resolution to do something about busyness and stress in your life only to find nothing really



changing? Noise and movement make up so much of our lives that we don't know how to effectively stop when a little "R and R" is attempted. There is among Americans a common illness called "leisure sickness."¹ This malady manifests itself in several forms, such as flulike symptoms, headache, sore throat, and muscle aches. Essentially, our bodies and emotions are so stressed out during the week that in the evenings and particularly the weekends we fall apart. The only prescription for this social fever is a change in lifestyle.

I am the pastor of a large church in a busy suburb, a husband, and the father of four children. The opportunities to send myself into the "rubber room" of insanity abound. Preparing sermons, managing staff, meeting parishioners' expectations, tending to constant changes that need to be implemented, spending time with family, paying individual attention to each of my children, having individual time with my wife, exercising, staying in touch with my extended family, helping with science projects, going to children's sports events—the list goes on and on. I don't know how many times people have approached me with the words "I'm concerned about you; you have too much to handle." I think I lived so long under extreme stress that I lost sense of what was happening. It had become routine and normal. This is a scary place to be.

So the impetus for my initial search for connectedness or community was not a need to prepare a sermon or write a book but a need for personal sanity. I knew I couldn't obtain connectedness by increasing my speed or extending my hours of work. King Solomon tried it about three thousand years ago and found out that it doesn't work. I'm nowhere close to being the smartest guy in the world, but I'm smart enough to listen to the world's wisest person.

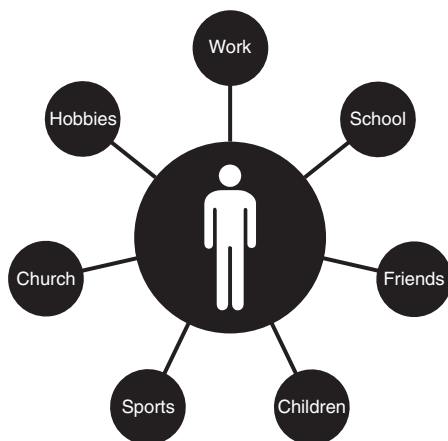
I needed something fresh, something deeper. I also had a sense of urgency. Several years ago as my daughter approached her sixteenth birthday, I realized that I wouldn't have much more time with my children, and I didn't think my health would hold out under the daily pressure I was voluntarily inflicting on it. At the same time

I didn't want my life to be meaningless. I didn't want to retire from life and sit on the back-porch rocker watching little birds suck juice out of a jar. I've always lived with a strong sense that God has a calling on my life, that he has something for me to accomplish. But I needed to find some balance and establish some boundaries. Certainly, a big part of what God has for my life is what I can *become* as a person in Christ—not just what I *do* for Christ.

The solutions to my dilemma were rooted in God's Word, coupled with the common sense of sages who have gone before us. It has rescued me from a life of running on a hamster's wheel, a life of motion without meaning.

Managing Your Relationships

Let's begin our journey together with some self-discovery. Grab a pen or pencil and a piece of paper. Now look at the following illustration.



The individual in the center represents a person who is trying to make more room for life. Each of the smaller circles represents a relationship that they manage. They may invest time daily in a particular relationship, or only a few times a year. Think about your life

and the various relationships you manage, and draw a circle for each.

When you've completed this, go back to each circle you have drawn and ask yourself the question, "Is that really one relationship group, or are there more worlds within each circle that are managed separately?" For example, if you have more than one child, do they go to the same school? If not, then you need to draw a separate circle for each school. If you are married, does your spouse work? If you don't both work at the same place, then you need to draw an additional circle representing this separate relationship. If you have children, are they involved in sports? If so, are they involved in multiple sports like soccer, baseball, and volleyball? What about music lessons? How about extended family? You should already have a circle representing your family and another circle representing your spouse's family. Do they all live in the same town, or are they spread throughout different states? If they are in different cities or states, then you need to draw a circle for each one. Are you in a blended family situation? If there is joint custody, then you need to draw a circle for each relationship. How about your hobbies? Maybe you have a group you golf with and a group you play cards with. Draw a different circle if these are not the same people. What about past friends you try to maintain contact with—college friends, friends you had in other places you lived, and so forth?

If you live in suburban America, you're probably getting a little stressed by now, but please continue on for a few more minutes. Now consider church. If you are involved in a church, is it really one circle, or are there many circles of different activities and relationships (missions committee, women's groups, choir, youth groups, small group, support group, elder board, and the like)? The average suburban American who is really involved in church life can have four to six different circles. If an entire family is fully involved, there can be as many as fifteen different circles. Draw a circle for each activity or ministry you are involved with. Before you've finished drawing your circles, get some feedback from others about

ones you may have overlooked. Be sure you have a circle representing the persons you will ask before you seek their counsel.

Next, you need to consider the line drawn to each circle. These lines represent your commute to these relationships. You may consider drawing an object next to each line that represents the means by which you engage in this relationship. These may be automobiles, airplanes, letters, e-mail, telephones, and so forth. Place a time value on each line representing a round-trip commute to and from that circle. For example, if it takes you an average of forty-five minutes to get to work, write down ninety minutes. I'd invite you to multiply this for the entire month, but it just might put you over the edge.

Now let's consider the issue of commuting in an automobile. Harvard University's Robert Putnam, in his best-selling book, *Bowling Alone*, gives some startling statistics on American commuting.² His studies show that the average American family engages in thirteen automobile commutes a day! When I first heard this statistic, I immediately dismissed it as not a reality for my family. However, after taking a moment to calculate the average business and school day, I found myself easily within these parameters. To add to the misery, recent studies suggest that 80 percent of cars on the road systems in cities and suburbs in America only have one person in them—the driver.³ The only source for two-way interaction is either the unwholesome hand gestures exchanged when one is cut off or the cell phone.

Robert Putnam suggests this formula: For every ten minutes you spend in an automobile, you reduce your available social capital [time for relationships] by 10 percent.⁴ If his calculations are accurate, as you look at the drawing of your social world you may conclude that you not only don't have any social capital available at the end of the day, but also that you are going into social debt. If you believe that we are created as social beings who require a quantity (and a quality) of people interaction each day to survive, then this means we are dying—not from physical illnesses only but from social illness as well. I'm quite confident that, as historians look back

on this era in which we live, one of the marks we will bear is *the death of community*.

Many people turn to the church to solve their problem of loneliness and disconnectedness. Because the church has been commissioned by Christ to reach out and to develop a functioning community, it is an appropriate place to turn. The church's principal solution for community over the last thirty to forty years has been the small group. Without question, the small group movement has made its mark on society. Studies show that 40 percent of Americans are involved in some kind of small group.⁵ Many people get involved in such a group to find a point of connection and a greater sense of intimacy and belonging, to have a place where they can share their fears and dreams. Testimony reveals that small groups are good and helpful. But studies also show that they often don't work.⁶

Thinking of the old Chinese proverb that says "the beginning of wisdom is to call something by its right name," go back to your personal galaxy and add a circle for your small group (if you haven't already). Now rename the small group according to what you see and feel. How about the name "Another World to Manage"? The fault does not lie with the concept of smallness or with the people. The problem lies with *orbit management*. Most people confess to rushing from one world to a totally separate world of small group. In other words, the people in their small group are not involved in any other world they are managing. Very few small group members get together outside of the formal meeting date, not because there isn't a desire, but because there just isn't any time. While attempts are made, there is little chance the members of the small group can get their arms around your world or your arms around theirs. Their lives simply do not intersect anywhere except the small group meeting—and perhaps a quick "hello" at church on Sunday morning. We are simply not principal characters in each other's worlds.

If you haven't done so already, finish drawing your worlds, or add new ones that came to mind as you read. What are your

thoughts about what you have drawn? If you're the average person, you'll be seeing a picture of stress. Take some time to give the right name to your life. How about "Lost in Space," or "Everybody Knows My Name, but Nobody Knows Me," or "Planet Hopper," or "Space Shuttle Dweller." How about a new name for your car such as "Cocoon on Wheels" or "Mobile Penitentiary Cell." If we are going to make room for life, these are the kinds of honest confrontations on our existing lifestyles we must have.

As you read the following pages, determine now that you're going to establish your own specific thoughts at the end of each chapter as well as a list of action steps that will move you further from *mere existence* and closer to *authentic living*. My goal and passion are not just to see you exist in a life of crowded loneliness but to give you a vision for a new way of life—along with the practical steps to get there. The ideas will be easy to understand, but the implementation will take courage. But if you're like me and so many others I know, you're ready for a change.

My Thoughts on This Chapter

Small Group Discussion

- When you hear the words “making room for life,” what does it mean to you? If you successfully made more room for life, what would you be doing?
- Share the drawings of your worlds with each other.
- Who in your group has the most relationships to manage? Who has the fewest? Why?
- How many people in your small group know the people in your other circles?
- If the members of your discussion group went with you to visit an individual or group of people from another circle whom they didn’t know, what would you want your small group members to know ahead of time? Do you behave differently when you are in different circles (i.e. more talkative, less talkative, leader, follower, respected, not respected, looked up to, looked down on, angry, happy, relaxed, uptight, proud, embarrassed, and so on)?
- Share the amount of time you and your family spend in an automobile on an average day or week. Are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the amount of time you spend commuting to your different worlds?
- Discuss the difference between “loneliness” and “crowded loneliness.” Which of these do you have a tendency to struggle with more?
- Share your number one discovery from this chapter.
- Identify and share one personal action step you will take to begin making more room for life.

- ❑ Community-Building Exercise: Go to your local mall as a group. Observe how many people are there but how little interaction is taking place. Count the number of people who are alone. Then treat yourself to a coffee, soda, or a dip of ice cream.

Personal Action Steps

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The Connection Requirement

Created for Community

If we hope to be successful in truly making room for life, we're going to have to rebuild our current lifestyles on a new foundation. We cannot simply pour more money and energy into the paradigm of crowded loneliness. Managing an endless number of disconnected linear relationships is exhausting. But more than just making us tired, this way of life is toxic. We were created with a connection requirement, and if this requirement is not satisfied, we will eventually die. If we ever became convinced of this, it would make our pursuit of a connecting life a higher priority. This, then, is the goal of this chapter.

“We” versus “Me”

North Americans have a reverence for individuality and consumerism. It flows from the teaching of men like René Descartes, who

popularized the phrase “I think, therefore I am.” At first this seems like a rather benign and esoteric philosophic phrase. Its most basic meaning suggests that one’s identity flows from oneself. After all, Whitney Houston sang that to love oneself was “the greatest love of all.” Without boundaries, Americans have taken the concept of self-identity to a new level afforded them by wealth. In America, success is defined by the next purchase. In other places around the world success is defined by a simple meal and conversation with family and friends. The accumulation of stuff is added to our “net worth” statement that deems us “worthy” in relationship to others who have less. Therefore, we passionately pursue the next purchase in an attempt to raise our perceived value. These are two very different foundations to build a life on with two very different results. We now live by the phrase “I purchase/accumulate, therefore I am.”

In one of their “Strange but True” columns titled “Selling the ‘me’ versus ‘we,’” brothers Rich and Bill Sones answered this question: “How are ads that target consumers in individualistic societies such as the United States and Canada different from ads in communal societies such as Korea?”

The former try to sell EGO and what the product can do for you, the latter sell SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS and how the product can foster feelings of belonging and harmony. . . .

“Be all that you can be. Join the Army,” is a classic U.S. pitch at individualistic ego-enhancement. Toyota’s “I love what it does for me. From any angle” (the car pictured front and sideways) succeeds in the U.S., but “The best relationships are lasting ones . . . Toyota Quality” works better in communal Korea. When researchers Sang-Pil Han and Sharon Shavitt tested chewing gum ads in both cultures, they found “Treat yourself to a breath-freshening experience” worked in one but not the other; the same for “Share a breath-freshening experience.” Can you guess which was which?⁷

If you, like most people I know, are worn out from a lifestyle of accumulation, then an invitation to a lifestyle of conversation and community is welcome. Our universal longing for community is a validation in and of itself of the connection requirement. It should make us want to run to this new place.

South African Anglican minister the Reverend Desmond Tutu has coined a term that exposes a richer foundation for living—one built on community and conversation in contrast to individualism and accumulation. The term is *ubuntu*. *Ubuntu* is African for “people” and has come to represent a community theology that can be expressed in the phrase “we are, therefore I am.” This powerful phrase suggests that one’s identity is formed by community.⁸ One of the fundamental beliefs of *ubuntu* can be expressed in the African saying *motho ke motho ba batho ba bangwe/umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*, which means, “A person can only be a person through others.”⁹ In other words, our perceived value goes up in proportion to our investment in community. This teaching implies that we were designed with a connection requirement. I’d like to further suggest that this belief structure is more in keeping with what God had in mind when he created us.

Created for Connection

How were we made? What are the requirements for us to live a healthy and fruitful life? Let’s draw our attention to the original design of human life in Genesis 1–2 to find the answers. In the six-day description of the creation of the heavens and the earth and all living things within it, God makes a journal entry into his construction log: “It is good.” This should not surprise us given the scope and depth of God’s capacity. On the sixth day, God unveils his supreme creation—us! With the inclusion of the human being into the equation God makes this final comment in chapter 1: “God saw all that he had made, and it was very good.” Trinity Construction

engaged in history's ultimate design-build project. I'd love to see the drawings on how one goes about setting the sun, moon, and stars in their proper places.

When we get to chapter 2 of Genesis, the author goes into greater detail on God's design and purpose for man. We are told that God took dust from the ground and formed it into the human shape. Then, he breathed into Adam's lifeless nostrils the "breath of life," and Adam became a living being (Genesis 2:7). We are told that God provided a dwelling place for Adam called the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2:8–14). As you read the description of this place you get the idea that Adam had a home that makes Bill Gates's estate look like a tool shed. We are told that Adam was given the job of caring for the garden—which couldn't have been too hard since weeds hadn't yet been created (Genesis 3:18). We're also told that Adam was to eat to his heart's content from any of the trees except one—the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 2:16–17). What a deal to have only one law to obey. It would never be this simple again.

Then in Genesis 2:18 the unexpected happens. After six consecutive entries of how good things were—the last entry even suggesting that the whole project was very good—we are not expecting God to say that something is not good, but he does. "The LORD God said, 'It is *not good* for the man to be alone'" (Genesis 2:18, emphasis added). What does this mean?

If God knew that man could not handle human isolation, why did he not deal with this up front on day six? I believe this is God's way of highlighting for us man's need for community. If God had created Eve on the sixth day, along with Adam, we might have taken for granted the absolute importance of companionship and conversation. I think God delayed the creation of Eve to drive the point home that humans have not been created to be alone. In other words, *community is the only change order in creation*. God is saying that he designed humans to require oxygen to live. By the same

token, he is also saying that we must have community to live! We are built with a connection requirement.

“We Theology”

For most of my Christian life, I’ve read the New Testament letters as though the authors were writing to individuals about growing as individuals in Christ. I took the perspective of American individualism and consumerism and read it into Scripture: “Everything is all about me.” After gaining an understanding that the mission of the church is to build up and bring to maturity the body of Christ, which is made up of all of us, not just me, I now see that I had been missing the communal purpose of life.

I have a call as an individual to become like Christ in the way I live. This call is empowered by the Spirit of God within me as I yield my life in obedience to God’s Word. However, this call must not be seen in isolation, apart from my interaction with other believers. To do so would be like exercising your right arm when you lifted weights but not your left. If you did this over time, your body would begin to look rather lopsided and strange. Together we are to give ourselves to loving God and loving each other. As a unified body, with Christ as the Head, we are to love others outside this community of faith in the hope that they will experience the love of Christ through us and even join us—because Christ’s offer is for everyone (Ephesians 4:14–16). The Protestantism that drives American Christianity has a streak of “protesting” things like community. Our attitude is often one that promotes rugged individualism over community. When we open the New Testament, we often read it in light of our individualism, reading a “me theology” into what is written. We would do well to look at the perspective of our Catholic brothers and sisters who have historically read the Bible from a community perspective often called a “we theology.” We are, after all, *created with a connection requirement.*

Evidence of the Connection Requirement

If it is true that God designed us with a connection requirement, then it would stand to reason that if someone were isolated from connection, it would have serious negative effects on his or her life. The American Institute of Stress has conducted extensive research on the role of social support in health. The findings are conclusive, incessant, and staggering. Directly off the pages of their research reports are these words: “The wisdom of the ages, anecdotal observations, careful clinical case studies and trials, epidemiological data on marriage, divorce and death, as well as sophisticated psychophysiological and laboratory testing—all confirm that strong social support is a powerful stress buster.”¹⁰ This summary statement basically says that it doesn’t take a medical doctor to conclude that community is essential to life, but if you need this kind of evidence, they’ll provide it in spades.

For example, careful research was conducted on 232 patients who had undergone cardiac surgery. Of these patients, twenty-one died within six months. Two statistically significant mortality predictors that emerged from these twenty-one cases were a “lack of participation in social or community groups, and the absence of strength and comfort from religion.”¹¹ The medical community has pondered the strong connection between community and cardiovascular disease and concluded that wholesome community reduces hyperactive cardiovascular reactivity to stress.¹² When that community is spiritually based, health rises even further. Here is a scientific verification that God created us with a connection requirement.

Another example comes from a recent Swedish report that demonstrates that middle-aged men who had recently endured high levels of emotional stress but had little emotional support were three times as likely to die over the next seven years as those with close personal ties.¹³ A California study involving seven thousand men and women found that after nine years those with the fewest social ties were twice as likely to die as those with the strongest ones.¹⁴ The American Institute of Stress also cites a report indicat-

ing that social activity can predict cardiac mortality as strongly as elevated cholesterol and serum lipid patterns.¹⁵ Research shows that “social support is linked with higher mortality rates for heart attacks, diabetes, rheumatoid arthritis and other autoimmune disorders.”¹⁶ Finally, another well-documented study shows that “social isolation contributes to illness and death as much as smoking.”¹⁷ So if you feel you must smoke, for goodness’ sake, *don’t do it alone!*

In this chapter we’ve learned that we are created with a connection requirement. After reading these first two chapters, many people will nod their heads in agreement, concluding that they possess the social support necessary to satisfy the divine requirement. Most people, as a matter of fact, might even conclude that companionship isn’t their particular problem. We have people all around us.

In reality, though, it’s possible to be in the company of others and still feel isolated. Community specialists call this brand of isolation experienced by the majority of Americans as “crowded loneliness.” It is the most dangerous loneliness of all because it emits a false air of community that prevents us from diagnosing our dilemma correctly. We have exposure to people but not a deep connection to people. The truth is that there is a huge gap between God’s original design for connection and the way most of us live our lives. Over the last fifty to seventy-five years, Americans and people from other advanced industrialized places either have never understood this design requirement or have downgraded it to an optional amenity. We must dissolve that gap and close it, or we will continue to struggle, suffer, and—I would even dare to suggest—die before our time.

My Thoughts on This Chapter

Small Group Discussion

- ❑ Using Genesis 2 as evidence, this chapter suggests that community is as important as air for human survival. Do you agree or disagree? Explain your answer.
- ❑ This chapter suggests that we need to make a shift from a lifestyle of accumulation to a lifestyle of conversation. Describe and discuss these two lifestyles.
- ❑ What makes a lifestyle of accumulation so attractive that we continue to pursue it beyond our means and beyond common sense?
- ❑ Do people really long for community and conversation? Do we not have it because we don't want it or because we don't know how to develop it? Discuss your answers.
- ❑ How do you feel about the evidence that the condition of a person's physical health is connected to their level of relational connectivity? Do you believe you or those in your network of relationships have physical problems because of a lack of significant community?
- ❑ Share your number one discovery from this chapter.
- ❑ Identify and share one personal action step you will take in making more room for life.
- ❑ Community-Building Exercise: Read the letter to the Ephesians together from a "we" perspective instead of a "me" perspective. Discuss your observations about the difference.

Personal Action Steps

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THE SOLUTION: Restructuring Our Relationships and Time

The solution to our problem of crowded loneliness involves a restructuring of our relationships and our time. Most of us know that something must be done, but we're at a loss as to what to do. In the following chapters you'll be introduced to ancient principles that work. Read on, O weary one. Help is on the way.

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The Secret of the Bedouin Shepherd

The Solution Is Not More of the Same

Several years ago I took my first trip to Israel. Our group traveled on a luxurious tour bus from one ancient city to the next, taking in the wonderful religious and spiritual sites of the Holy Land. In between the cities we would pass by hot, dry desert hills on the left and right. It appears to be the part of the Holy Land that the milk and honey never reached. Even though I was encased in an air-conditioned vehicle, my impulse was to reach for my bottled water and my fifty-block sunscreen.

Intermittently on these various hillsides were the shabby box tents of the Bedouin shepherds. I remember shaking my head and pondering how difficult life must be for them. Each of my four children has their own room equipped with gadgets too embarrassing to speak of here. As I gazed at the tents, they did not appear to have a 4/3/3 configuration (four bedrooms, three baths,

three-car garage). I remember studying about the Bedouin in seminary in connection with the little shepherd boy who found some of the Dead Sea Scrolls in a cave in the ancient Qumran community in 1947. The photographed faces of the men and women in the texts I studied contained deep wrinkles parched by excessive exposure to the sun. The gap in the way of life between those of us on the tour bus and the Bedouin shepherds was enormous. I definitely felt I was the privileged one.

Then our Arab-Christian tour guide grabbed the microphone at the front of the bus and turned my world upside down. He said, “Off to your right you will see the mobile residence of the Bedouin shepherd and his family. Once their livestock has grazed the available vegetation, the family will pick up their humble homes and move to a new place to repeat the cycle.” He went on to say that *the average Bedouin lives to be over one hundred years old!* Without even meaning to, I blurted out, “How can this be?” Abed, the guide, informed us of a study recently completed by the government of Israel. They were just as curious about the Bedouin’s longevity as I was and wanted to get to the bottom of their secret, bottle it, and sell it alongside the mineral-rich mud of the Dead Sea that promises to create youthful skin. It was obvious by looking at them that the Bedouin did not apply the mudpacks to their faces, but they did something far better.

The first hunch was to study the diet of the Bedouin. While it is true that their meals include whole foods, no preservatives, no candy, and a moderate intake of meat, this was not the number one cause of the Bedouin’s longevity. Abed revealed the secret: *no stress*.

This makes complete sense! Stress makes us sick, drives us crazy, and can kill us some thirty years before a poor shepherd dies at the age of a hundred. Most Bedouin would not change places with us, even if given the opportunity. And why would they? So they can be stressed-out as they run hard to nowhere?

What does the average day in the life of the Bedouin family look like? The family rises from their tents slightly before sunrise so they

are ready to capture the precious hours of sunlight. There is just enough sun peering over the horizon to see the objects in front of them. As the sun comes up, each member of the family has a job to do. Some tend the sheep—the core business of the Bedouin. Some make clothes or prepare for the upcoming meals. Some will mend with needle and thread the tears in the tents. At various intervals, the Bedouin make their way to town to barter the wool of their sheep for other staple items such as food and materials.

Whatever work to be accomplished is done during the day before the sun sets. There is no artificial light to expand the workday. Everyone gathers back to the cluster of tents—mother, father, children, grandparents, aunts, uncles. There are no television sets, no phone calls, no e-mails. Each night the family gathers for dinner. They are in no particular hurry. Often a fire is built and the Bedouin, young and old, gather around it. There may be music and singing, and stories from the past as well as stories of the day are told. Each evening can involve three to four hours of simply being together.

Because so much of the work of the Bedouin is physical, there is no need to squeeze in a trip to the gym across town or an appointment with a personal trainer. They are tired at the end of the day and routinely go to bed at the same time each night. As the young Bedouin shepherd boy lies down, all is quiet and peaceful; there is no incessant noise of city life to contend with. He peers up into the sky filled with constellations. Thoughts of a mighty God swim in his head. These will be his last thoughts as he falls asleep. Some say the slumber of the Bedouin is a deep replenishing sleep that eludes most “privileged” suburbanites.

Even now as I write this chapter it is Christmas Day, and I’m stuck in an airport in Charlotte, North Carolina, trying to get my family across the country from Texas to Ohio to be with our extended families for the holidays. We just received news that our flight has been cancelled. This is the second flight cancelled for us today. It’s highly probable we’ll spend the remainder of this special day right here in the airport.

I walked into a little bar and grill in the airport called “Cheers.” Everything looks like it came right out of the set of the famous Boston sitcom. Only one problem: *nobody knew my name*. We were in a strange place, we had a fast-food dinner, and we didn’t have a single family member in the entire state of North Carolina with whom to share Christmas. All this for a mere \$1,800 in airfares. You really have to have a little discretionary money or air miles to ruin a great holiday. For some reason, I think the Bedouin shepherd would get a bigger laugh about my Christmas experience than anything Shelly Long ever said to Ted Danson!

The Bedouin do not live the hectic life of managing disconnected worlds of shallow linear relationships. There is a beautiful simplicity and a unity and rhythm with creation that extends their lives some thirty years beyond ours. They do not have access to our money or our medications. They have no need for them. The Bedouin are not the only people group that has discovered this kind of life—but it is a life that eludes the American suburbanite, almost as though we weren’t invited to the meeting or didn’t get the memo. Or could it be that we ignored it?

What is the secret of the Bedouin? The Bedouin approach *relationships* and *time* in a manner completely different from the way we do. This is their secret. It is a way of life that dances with the rhythm of creation. It is a way of life that is filled with a certain brand of community. It is a way of life that is free from the kind of stress we inflict on our lives and that creates all kinds of emotional and physical health problems that can take us out earlier than the master plan demands.

The way of life I speak of is as old as life itself. It sits plainly on the pages of the first two chapters of the Holy Bible. It is reinforced throughout the remainder of the Scriptures. Very seldom is it overtly discussed because it was the way life was established. People were born into it and didn’t know to call it to our attention. They didn’t “know that they knew.” We, on the other hand, have lived most of our lives “not knowing that we did not know.”

My goal for us is twofold: to get us to “know that we do not know” and then to move us to the point that we “know that we know.” It is probably too optimistic to think that our generation can ever get to the stage of the people of the Bible or the Bedouin shepherd, where we “don’t know that we know.” But this way of life can be realized by ourselves personally and by the people around us if we have the vision and the courage.

Make this note: *This lifestyle can’t be bought with money.* As a matter of fact, the excessive money of many Americans may be the single greatest obstacle to attaining a stress-free lifestyle. We can have the money to purchase the nicest and most exotic hammock made, but it doesn’t mean that we’ll find much rest in it. Who knows, if we point the next generation to the right path and attempt to actually live in community and reject crowded loneliness, perhaps their children will be rightfully called “the New Bedouin!”

My Thoughts on This Chapter

Small Group Discussion

- ❑ If you were counseling a friend who was stressed-out, how would you use the story of the Bedouin shepherd to encourage and guide her?
- ❑ Stress makes us sick and can even threaten our very existence. Discuss the stress points in your life and schedule right now. Do you believe that, if you don't resolve these issues, they'll be detrimental to your health? What are some workable solutions you could glean from this chapter?
- ❑ What will it take for Americans and others in modern cities around the world to make a change? Is it likely this will happen in your lifetime? Will you make changes, even if the rest of the people around you don't? Discuss some practical steps you could take.
- ❑ Share your number one discovery from this chapter.
- ❑ Identify and share one personal action step you will take in making more room for life.
- ❑ Community-Building Exercise: Go on an overnight camp-out in a nearby park or simply camp out in your backyard. If the weather doesn't cooperate, set up the sleeping bags in the living room. If you have small children, let them dress up for bed as they imagine shepherd children might dress.

Personal Action Steps

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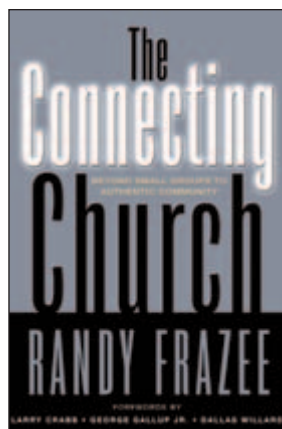
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to Authentic Community

Randy Frazee

Forewords by Larry Crabb,
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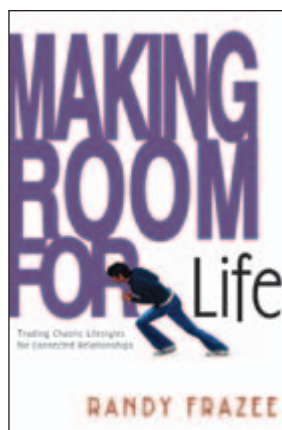
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Randy Frazee

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