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BETHANY LUTHERAN CHURCH

ELKHORN, NEBRASKA

JANUARY 23, 2005

PASTOR MARK FRY

1 PASTOR FRY: This is a challenging sermon for me to
2 give, they all are, but I would covet your prayers. Would
3 you pray for me for a few moments before I get up and share,
4 please?

5 Thank you for that.

6 Pastor Wenda shared last week as we were getting
7 ready to plan this series, a couple weeks ago I took my son
8 to Kansas City for an audition.

9 It was a long car ride down and back, but I took a
10 book with me when I went down there and it's this book
11 called "Making Room For Life; Trading Chaotic Lifestyles For
12 Connected Relationships".

13 I had about two hours in the parents' lounge there
14 and I read most of this book that first shot and got back
15 that night probably about midnight and Wenda was halfway
16 asleep.

17 I said, "I read that book you gave me."

18 She said, "What did you think?"

19 I said, "Well, if we have a worship series based on
20 this it might be the last worship series we ever do at
21 Bethany. They could get really upset."

22 I said, "We are at ground zero of what this book is
23 really aiming at."

24 And she said, "I know. It's really kind of scary,"
25 and it is.

1 Just having said that, we've got these available
2 for purchase back there. A lot of people ordered them last
3 week.

4 But the premise of this book is like that book from
5 Ecclesiastes.

6 There is a time for everything, but time kind of
7 gets mixed up sometimes.

8 There is a time to be born and die. The author of
9 Ecclesiastes is a guy who calls himself The Teacher, and he
10 has been there; done that.

11 He has had immense amounts of wealth. He has had
12 tremendous amounts of wisdom and he has been everywhere.

13 He has chased after that dream and he kind of comes
14 back to the simplicity of teaching people you have enough
15 time, and there's nothing better than to be happy and to
16 eat, drink, and to enjoy what you do.

17 And that's the conclusion that this guy comes to
18 and that's really what Randy Frazee comes to in this book as
19 well.

20 I'm going to share a little bit from it with you
21 and in your worship folder is a piece of paper called me and
22 my relationships.

23 So if you want to do this, I encourage you to do
24 it, it's an eye-opener.

25 This is a happy picture of me up on the screen, and

1 this is me, but what you are going to do is draw yourself in
2 the middle.

3 And then you are going to have basically seven or
4 eight little boxes going off of that, little circles going
5 out.

6 So you are going to have these little globes and
7 these are what they are.

8 You have one for community; one for sports; you
9 have one for work.

10 Mine is weird that way because work is church for
11 me, so you are going to have separate ones on that.

12 You are going to have hobbies, school, family, and
13 you are going to have friends.

14 If you are a school teacher, then work and school
15 would be the same, so that's what I mean.

16 The number is a little bit elusive, but those are
17 my globes. Those are my spheres.

18 What I am going to do this morning is walk you
19 through a little bit of what Randy Frazee is doing in this
20 book then when we start looking at our relationships like
21 that.

22 There is a little bit of a homework assignment, but
23 listen to me while you're doing that, okay?

24 The individual in the center represents a person
25 who is trying to make more room for life.

1 Each of the smaller circles represents a
2 relationship that they attempt to manage.

3 They may invest time daily in a particular
4 relationship or only a few times a year.

5 Think about your life and the various relationships
6 that you manage and draw a circle for each.

7 You might have a couple that don't fit in those
8 categories. You can sure add another circle.

9 When you've completed this, go back to each circle
10 that you've drawn and ask yourself a question.

11 Is this really one relationship group or are there
12 more worlds within each circle that are managed separately?

13 For example, if you have more than one child down
14 there at that family circle, do they go to the same school?

15 If not, then you need to draw a separate circle for
16 each school.

17 If you are married, does your spouse work outside
18 the home?

19 If you don't both work at the same place then you
20 need to draw an additional circle representing that separate
21 relationship.

22 So what you would have is two for work, because you
23 would have your work thing and your spouse's workplace
24 because, believe it or not, there are relationships within
25 your spouse's or your significance other's work space that

1 you've got some investment in.

2 You may need to go to the company Christmas party.
3 You may need to go to the picnic in the summer, whatever it
4 might be, you have separate circles. You are representing
5 that separate relationship.

6 If you have children, are they involved in sports?
7 If so, are they involved in multiple sports like baseball,
8 soccer and volleyball? What about music lessons?

9 What about your extended family? Each of those are
10 separate circles then, is what we are getting at, and they
11 kind of go off of those main globes that you've got.

12 Like family is it's going to go off; school is
13 going to go off, different schools.

14 My family is like this: It's my wife; it's my
15 kids; it's my brother; it's my sister; it's my mom; it's my
16 in-laws.

17 So those are all family relationships that I've
18 got.

19 And it gets even more complex than that because now
20 my daughter is married and so we have her in-laws that we
21 are in contact with.

22 Each of those circles keep going. You should have
23 a circle representing your family and other circles
24 representing your spouse's family.

25 Do they live in the same town or are they spread

1 throughout different states?

2 Wenda's family, they are in four different states;
3 my family is in two different states.

4 So we would have all these different relationships.
5 If they are in different cities or states then you need to
6 draw a circle for each one.

7 Are you in a blended family situation? If there's
8 joint custody then you need to draw a circle for each
9 relationship.

10 Then let's look at hobbies for a second. My
11 hobbies are up at the top, and I've got a few.

12 I've got reading and I've got golf. I play golf a
13 little bit, and I go fishing a little bit, and I also
14 collect baseball cards.

15 So those are all hobbies that will come into my
16 circle.

17 Maybe you have a group you golf with and a group
18 you play cards with.

19 Draw a different circle if these are not the same
20 people.

21 What about past friends you are trying to stay in
22 contact with, with college friends, with high school
23 friends?

24 Then I did work and church for me and I got
25 frustrated and I quit drawing circles after a while.

1 And the same with community, because I'm in the
2 Kiwanis Club, I'm on the board, and I'm also a member, so I
3 did that.

4 And then with the sports for me, I'm a member over
5 at the YMCA, so that is all I put for that.

6 Another day and time I would have had a lot more,
7 but those a lot of mine that are going on, baseball cards,
8 reading, golf, fishing, all those are hobbies.

9 Friends. This was really scary to me, really
10 scary, because you start thinking about the different people
11 you just have dinner with once in a while, and there's
12 really a lot of different people that are in that.

13 So, anyway, this is mine, and that was really not
14 all of it, but I quit because that's all that fit on there.

15 If you live in suburban America, and we do, you are
16 probably getting a little stressed by now. Please continue
17 on for a few more minutes.

18 Now consider church, and for me again work is
19 church; for most of you it's not.

20 If you are involved in a church, is it really one
21 circle or are there many circles of different activities and
22 relationships?

23 This is where I started just almost pulling my hair
24 out.

25 You've got the different committees, the different

1 women's groups, the different choirs, the different youth
2 groups.

3 You have the different small groups, the different
4 support groups, the different prayer groups, the different
5 elder groups, and if your kids are involved in stuff.

6 The average suburban American who is involved in a
7 church can have four to six different circles.

8 If an entire family is fully involved there can be
9 as many as fifteen different circles around the church.

10 Draw a circle for each activity of ministry that
11 you are involved with.

12 And before you finish drawing your circles get some
13 feedback from others.

14 I'm not going to let you do that because you'll
15 probably forget some and then you will really be frustrated.

16 Be sure to have a circle representing the person
17 that you ask before you seek their counsel, because they are
18 now a relationship.

19 Next you need to consider the line that is drawn to
20 each circle.

21 These lines represent your commute to those
22 relationships.

23 You may consider drawing an object next to each
24 line that represents the means by which you engage in this
25 relationship.

1 You could take this home and really get complex
2 with it. It might be part of a worksheet for you.

3 You might have an automobile, an airplane, a
4 letter, an email, a telephone, or so forth next to it.

5 In other words, some of those relationships you
6 keep going by email; some by visits on the airplane; some by
7 automobile rides.

8 My mom is five hours away, so that is five hours
9 over; five hours back.

10 Then if you really want to, you could place a time
11 value on each line representing the round trip commute to
12 and from that circle.

13 For example, if it takes you an average of
14 forty-five minutes to drive to work, write down ninety
15 minutes.

16 I'll invite you to multiply this over the entire
17 month, but it might just put you over the edge, he writes,
18 when you start thinking about the amount of time you put in
19 the car or the van or the airplane or the email, all the
20 different things that we have been talking about.

21 There is a book out called "Bowling Alone" by
22 Robert Putnam that shows the average American family engages
23 in thirteen different automobile commutes per day.

24 In other words, soccer practice; back. Baseball;
25 back. Dance lessons; back. Church; back. Small group at

1 church; back.

2 Thirteen per day, the average American in suburban
3 America.

4 The author says, "When I first read this statement
5 I immediately dismissed it as not reality for my family.
6 However, after taking a moment to calculate the average
7 business and school day I found myself easily within those
8 parameters.

9 "Recent studies suggest that 80 percent of the cars
10 on the road are single drivers.

11 "The only source for two-way interaction is either
12 the unwholesome hand gestures exchanged when one is cut off
13 in traffic or on the cell phone."

14 He talks in that book about what is called social
15 capital, which is the amount of time you have to invest in
16 relationships and how we are really running on short supply
17 of that.

18 Here is the clincher. "Many people turn to the
19 church to solve their problems of loneliness and
20 disconnectedness. Because the church has been commissioned
21 by Jesus to reach out and develop a functioning community
22 it's the appropriate place for us to turn.

23 "The church's principal solution for community over
24 the last thirty or forty years has traditionally been the
25 small group.

1 "Without question the small group movement has made
2 its mark on society.

3 "Studies show that forty percent of Americans are
4 involved in some kind of small group.

5 "Many people get involved in such a group to find a
6 point of connection and a greater sense of intimacy and
7 belonging; to have a place where they can share their fears
8 and their dreams.

9 "Testimony reveals that small groups are good and
10 helpful, but studies also show that oftentimes they don't
11 work.

12 "What are your thoughts about what you've drawn?
13 If you are the average person, you are seeing a picture of
14 stress.

15 "If we are going to make room for life, these are
16 some of the honest confrontations on our existing lifestyles
17 that we must have."

18 When I look at that I'm almost embarrassed, when I
19 see that, and I think to myself I'm not too far from the
20 author of this book.

21 And what he comes to say then is, "Linear
22 friendship models can be futile and fatal."

23 And those are linear friendship models. Those are
24 like ping pong balls.

25 You are going back and forth in lines, to a

1 tremendous amount of people and a tremendous amount of
2 relationships.

3 He said they are futile and they will be fatal. He
4 shares the story of not being able to sleep for six weeks
5 and he finally went to his doctor.

6 His doctor was doing all these tests on him and he
7 found out that he was so out of whack that his brain,
8 literally there is a light-triggering mechanism in the brain
9 and his was totally mixed up.

10 He couldn't tell the difference between day and
11 night and all of a sudden he went into melt down and he
12 couldn't sleep.

13 And the guy said, "We can either medicate you or we
14 can transfer you to Borneo."

15 He said, "By the way, what do you do for a
16 profession?"

17 He said, "I'm a pastor of a church."

18 He said, "Then there is no hope for you."

19 He said, "Well, I believe there is hope for me,"
20 and so what he has come up with is a different model of
21 relationships.

22 Not linear relationships, but what he wants to talk
23 about is more circular relationships.

24 But here is the point. He says, "There's a reality
25 check time and most of your friends are mere acquaintances."

1 That's a shocking statement, because I want to
2 think that my friends are my friends.

3 But if you continue with Randy Frazee's book you
4 are going to find out, I think, that my two stories maybe
5 fit into this.

6 And I need to share two stories that are very
7 painful for me to share.

8 When I was a junior in college I would work during
9 the summer and then I would go back to school in the fall
10 and I had a guy who arguably was my finest friend all
11 through high school.

12 His name was Mike. He went to one Lutheran
13 college; I went to another Lutheran college.

14 And we had similar summer breaks and so we were
15 getting ready to go back to school on a Tuesday.

16 But on the Friday right before that it came to my
17 attention that Alice Cooper was playing at the UNI dome in
18 Cedar Falls, Iowa, and this is the 1970s and Alice Cooper
19 was a big deal.

20 I said, "Mike, do you want to go to the concert?"

21 He said, "I would love to go to the concert."

22 So I ordered two tickets to the Alice Cooper
23 concert.

24 Burton Cummings of the Guess Who opened up. Great
25 concert, by the way.

1 And I ordered two tickets, my brother went to UNI,
2 he brought them home and gave them to me.

3 I paid him. I called Mike up and I said, "Mike,
4 I've got the tickets."

5 He said, "I'm sorry. I can't afford it."

6 I said, "What's the problem?"

7 He said, "I just don't have any money."

8 It was twelve bucks. I said, "That really kind of
9 saddens me. Are you sure you can't go?"

10 "No, I can't go."

11 "All right. I will find somebody else."

12 I took another buddy of mine, whose name
13 coincidentally was Mike, took him to the concert, great
14 concert.

15 Came back home, had a good time, everything else,
16 went back to school on Tuesday, got reenrolled in classes
17 and everything else.

18 On Thursday morning the phone rang on my dorm floor
19 and it was my mother.

20 She said, "I've got some bad news for you."

21 I said, "What is it, mom?"

22 She said, "Mike took his life today in college."

23 His funeral was held Saturday morning at the
24 Lutheran church in our hometown.

25 Nobody knew. That haunts me, and it was a seminal

1 moment in my life for a couple different reasons.

2 I thought he was a friend, a good friend, arguably
3 my best friend, and I didn't know what was going on in his
4 life.

5 Secondly, the other Lutheran church in town that he
6 was a member of refused to have his funeral.

7 So a Lutheran church opened their arms to him and
8 that to me, being at a Lutheran college, that meant
9 something to me; that that's what the church is supposed to
10 do.

11 So it was seminal for me in a couple different ways
12 and then the next year I met my wife at that same Lutheran
13 college. That's one of my friends and his tragic story.

14 The second is like it. Last year I had a funeral
15 in our prayer chapel for a guy who was one of the guys in
16 one of those spheres that was on my Power Point.

17 A member of our Kiwanis Club, tragically took his
18 own life, and we buried him, and his wife was hurting, and
19 she since has moved away.

20 But I did not even know until I met with her to
21 plan his funeral he lived one block from my house.

22 And I had the privilege of burying him, and his
23 wife came to me after the service and she said, "The people
24 of Nebraska are so friendly."

25 And that just stuck right in the bottom, the pit of

1 my heart.

2 Because we are friendly, but we don't do a real
3 good job of knowing who our neighbors are.

4 And we don't do a real good job of being
5 translucent, of letting them into our lives and us going
6 into theirs.

7 So those are a couple stories about how maybe some
8 of our friends aren't really friends, but maybe only mere
9 acquaintances.

10 Randy Frazee again says this. He said, "A person
11 doesn't really know you unless they know most of the people
12 in your other circles."

13 Think about that. Do your friends know your
14 parents?

15 Do your parents know your friends? Do your kids
16 know your friends? Do you know your kids' friends?

17 Does your church know your friends, and all of the
18 ways these different things get discombobulated.

19 Randy Frazee again says: "The linear world,"
20 that's that other world, "it leaves us isolated,
21 misunderstood, exhausted, anxious, and shallow."

22 Amen.

23 There are some relationships on there that I'm
24 ashamed of, that I didn't know some of the pain of the
25 people that I meet with on a regular basis.

1 They didn't tell me and I certainly am not going to
2 tell them what is really going on inside of me.

3 Randy Frazee's point is we don't have time to. We
4 are too much running around.

5 We are like ping pong balls going back and forth.
6 We aren't even doing anything as families anymore.

7 He has solutions. What he is developing then is
8 circles of relationships, instead of linear relationships.

9 Listen to this fascinating concept. It's called
10 the Hebrew day planner.

11 The Hebrew day planner is an ancient technique.
12 What has happened is over in Palenstine there is a group of
13 shepherds, they are called the Bedouin shepherds.

14 If you were here for Christmas Eve services at 4:00
15 and 6:00 we had some Bedouin sheep.

16 They are special sheep and they have these really
17 cool horns on them.

18 They are from the Middle East, but the Bedouin
19 shepherds are a curious lot.

20 They are very nomadic, but they also have been
21 investigated and scientifically examined by scientists for
22 dozens and dozens of years.

23 They have no stress in their lives. They do all
24 the indicators.

25 They check their cholesterol. They check their

1 anxiety levels.

2 They check their blood pressure. They check all
3 this stuff.

4 These guys just don't have it, and they all live to
5 be over a hundred years old.

6 So they scientifically determined that the Bedouin
7 shepherds live this long because they abide closely by what
8 is called the Hebrew day planner.

9 And the Hebrew day planner divides the day into
10 three periods of time; productivity, relationships, and
11 sleep.

12 And it's not that far from what we've got for night
13 and daytime.

14 There is a time for everything. Productivity,
15 relationships, and sleep.

16 Productivity is from 6:00 in the morning until 6:00
17 at night.

18 Relationships is from 6:00 at night until 10:00 at
19 night.

20 And in relationships, this is probably the key part
21 of it, here is what it looks like.

22 There is time for family; there is time for
23 extended family; there's time for sharing a meal; there is
24 time for friends; there's time for story telling.

25 Notice in that time there is nothing for

1 television.

2 There is nothing for computer; there is nothing for
3 internet; there is nothing for fax machines.

4 It is all based on those simple gifts of family,
5 extended family, sharing a meal, friends, story telling.

6 And what Randy Frazee said is that's what we did
7 when I was a kid, and he's only in his forties.

8 He said when I was a kid we used to watch Bonanza
9 together as a family and then we would play board games.

10 We would eat at home -- what a concept -- and we
11 would tell stories.

12 Sometimes the neighbors would come over, sometimes
13 the grandparents would come over, sometimes different people
14 would come together, and that's what the relationships
15 looked like.

16 We used to do that, too. But now, here's my
17 family, my home, we've got five TV sets in our house and we
18 only have three people.

19 My son watches something downstairs on his. I
20 watch something in the bedroom once in a while on mine and
21 Wenda watches something on hers up in the attic.

22 We don't watch the same things and he's saying
23 don't even use TV as an example, if you think we are going
24 to watch TV or movies tonight, there is no relationship
25 established during that either.

1 And then finally the sleep time is from 10:00 p.m.
2 to 6:00 a.m., the recommended eight hours.

3 It's not reinventing the wheel, but it is looking
4 different.

5 Wenda was saying last week that I already kind of
6 live by this, and I don't think it was by choice, I think it
7 was just by chance and challenge, I'm pretty much shot by
8 10:00 o'clock at night anymore and I do like to get up in
9 the morning.

10 What I also find when I do that, I get a heck of a
11 lot more done, when I get to the office early and get stuff
12 cranked out, and when I intentionally try to meet people
13 during the day and people on Sunday mornings, that's when
14 our church council is trying to meet, because I know I
15 function better.

16 My coaches used to always say nothing good happens
17 after 10:00 o'clock at night, and I kind of believe that.

18 Randy Frazee was working until 2:00, 3:00, 4:00 in
19 the morning, and always had a laptop in front of him, all
20 that kind of stuff.

21 Some of us get into that. Here is another quote
22 from him.

23 He said, "I'm suggesting that we rediscover the
24 beauty of the Hebrew day planner as a timeless principle for
25 a healthy life and that we go on to engineer our lives in

1 such a way that we readapt to its role in our lives."

2 I think I have a picture of my chart again up
3 there.

4 Is that the next slide? Look at that. How could
5 you get all that in?

6 The other thing that we are going to be striving
7 toward and talking about the next few weeks is how a lot of
8 those groups can be combined, and a lot of those different
9 things might better be achieved if we talked more about
10 proximity then we do about all the different disjointed
11 things that we've got.

12 And the church has done a disservice of that in the
13 past.

14 If you've ever been in a small group, I want you to
15 know that I give you my love and my praise and my prayers.

16 And if that has been a wonderful thing in your
17 life, likewise praise God for that, keep doing what you're
18 doing.

19 But if you have ever been in a small group and
20 maybe on Sunday night when it's almost time for it and you
21 find out that it has been canceled and you go, "Oh, thank
22 you, God," then maybe something is wrong.

23 If you have to find baby-sitters to get your kids
24 in to go to small group, and if you have had to move other
25 activities to go do that kind of stuff, I apologize.

1 We are going to have a thing on February 6th. It's
2 called a meet your neighbors breakfast.

3 There is really not a huge agenda to that. It's
4 just to link you with some of the people that live in
5 proximity to you.

6 That's what we want more as the model then to
7 develop some clusters, so that people can have some
8 intergenerational experiences of some of those things during
9 the relationship time of family, extended family, of story
10 telling, of sharing a meal, and not every day, but
11 occasionally.

12 I'm embarrassed that a guy died a block from my
13 house and I was in the same community group and I didn't
14 even know he lived there.

15 That's wrong. It's not healthy. Jesus says, "Who
16 is your neighbor?"

17 It's the person who lives close to you, is a pretty
18 good start.

19 And you ought to get to know their kids; you ought
20 to get to know their parents.

21 You ought to get to know the significant
22 relationships in your proximity area, those people right
23 around you that are hurting and need you.

24 Maybe you are thinking to yourself, thank God my
25 paper is not very clustered, not very busy.

1 I thank God for you, too, because those of us that
2 have a busy paper need you. Our kids need you.

3 We need to learn from you and we need to be with
4 you.

5 You have gifts we can benefit from, because you
6 need us, too.

7 You're not right and us wrong. We are in
8 relationship, and that's a very important factor in this
9 whole thing, too.

10 Jesus wants us to be neighbors, but he also wants
11 us to have connected relationships instead of such chaotic
12 lifestyles.

13 So here is the conclusion. Where are you? Are you
14 isolated, misunderstood, exhausted, anxious and shallow?

15 Kind of like the old thing I used to say. "How are
16 you doing?"

17 "I'm fine."

18 Which stands for Fouled up, Insecure, Neurotic and
19 Emotional. I'm FINE.

20 My daughter has a favorite band called the Dave
21 Matthews band.

22 I want to share a sound bite from that and then
23 we'll pray. Check this song out.

24

25

1

2

"He wakes up in the morning

3

Does his teeth, bite to eat & he's rolling

4

Never changes a thing

5

The week ends; the week begins

6

She thinks, we look at each other

7

Wondering what the other is thinking

8

But we never say a thing

9

And these crimes between us grow deeper

10

Take these chances

11

Place them in a box until a quieter time

12

Lights down, you up and die."

13

14

I pray that this might be a quieter time; that we

15

take this chance to look a little more closely at our time

16

management skills, and we need to ask yourselves some really

17

hard questions.

18

Are we doing our kids any favor, are we doing

19

ourselves any favor by living the lifestyles we are?

20

As I get older I realize the importance of

21

relationships and I realize also how lonely it is.

22

Like in that song, don't give up, but do give

23

prayer and do give some prayerful thought to how better to

24

be a Christian in this day and time, because we are being

25

led, I think, down a primrose path by some of the cultural

1 advancements that we are imbibing on.

2 Would you join me in prayer for a moment, please?

3 Lord, for everything there is a season and time for every
4 matter under heaven.

5 A time to live; a time to die. One day we will up
6 and die, and that makes some of us sad, because a lot of us
7 will die without truly living.

8 Lord, this is a new year, and this is a new day.

9 We thank you for the different people in our lives.

10 May we have your spirit to guide and guard us so
11 that we might invest more proper time; that we might just
12 slow down a little bit and make some faithful decisions that
13 are based on the long run; not just the short-term benefits.

14 Lord, shepherds know over in the Middle East about
15 the Hebrew day planner.

16 So give us insight into that, too, for you are our
17 shepherd, and we're your sheep, and we can be led. Just as
18 you will feed us, also lead us.

19 We pray in the name of the shepherd, Jesus, who was
20 always busy, but never in a hurry. Amen.

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