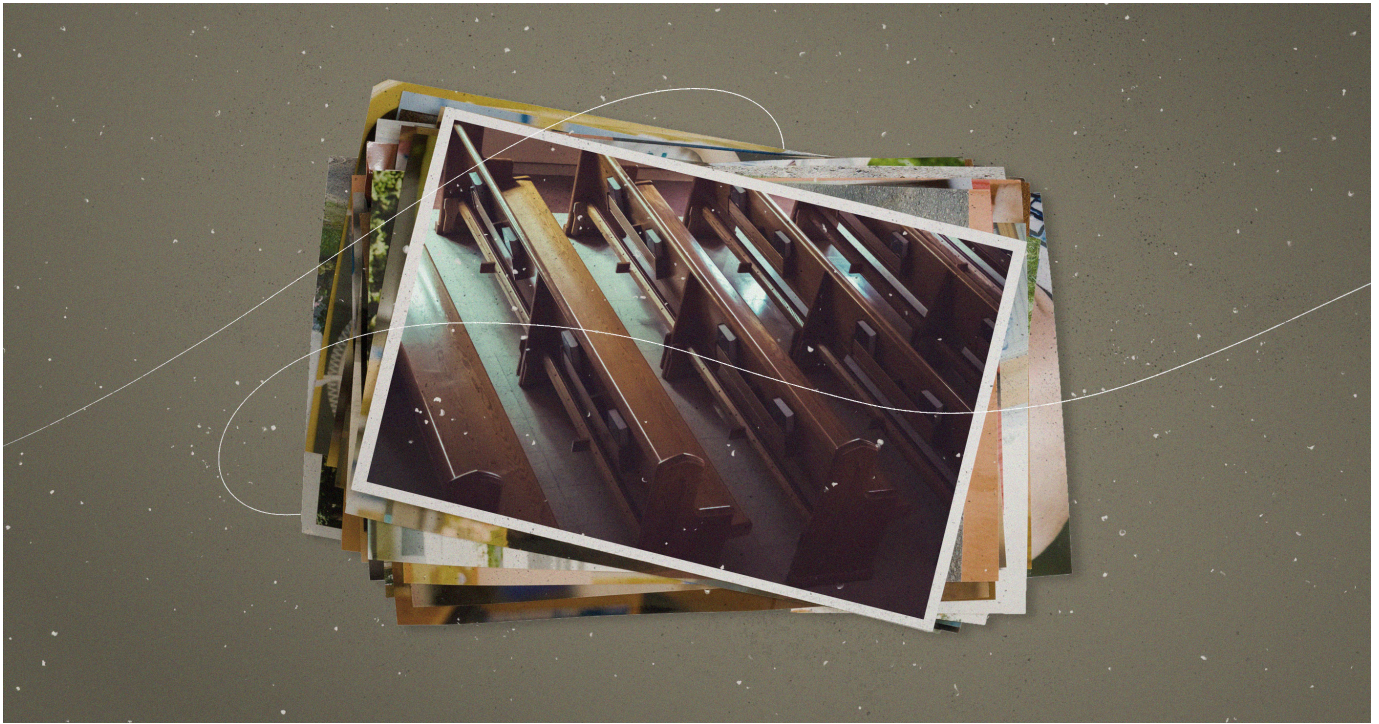


What Our Individualism Costs Us

May 28, 2025

by: Amy DiMarcangelo



A People

In Western culture, the high regard for autonomy and obsession with individualism has come at a cost: community. This lack of community (coupled with other factors) has contributed to rising loneliness, impacting our physical and mental well-being. In the church, it's impacting our spiritual health too.

When cultural Christianity was the norm, many who grew up in or around church inherited a false assurance of salvation. Mounting concerns over this problem resulted in a new focus on personal relationships with Jesus. This wasn't entirely ill-founded. God loves us as individuals and calls us as individuals to follow him. Going to church doesn't save you. Having Christian parents doesn't save you. Living in the Bible Belt doesn't save you. Jesus does, indeed, require personal allegiance.

However, well-intentioned efforts to emphasize the importance of a personal relationship with God have inadvertently diminished the importance of our corporate relationship. It doesn't end with just "Jesus and me." God has saved us individually to become *a people*: "You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy" (1 Pet. 2:9–10).



A Hunger for More

Amy DiMarcangelo

This book invites readers to feast at the table of grace, where they will find God's vast glory and his intimate care, his strength made perfect in weakness, and his gifts of joy and comfort to his children—that they "may be filled with all the fullness of God."

When we come to faith in Christ, we obtain citizenship into God's kingdom. We aren't lone rangers; we are indelibly linked to God's people. If we imagine that life is just about "me and Jesus," we won't function as faithful citizens.

God has set apart his church as a holy nation. One that operates with righteousness and justice, where the prosperous share with the poor and the powerful protect the weak. One where individuals work for the common good, more passionate about corporate flourishing than selfish gain. A place where the inhabitants don't only consider their own interests, but "decide never to put a stumbling block" and to "pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding" (Rom. 14:13, 19). A place overflowing with truth and grace and love.

Surrounding this holy nation, there is a war waging. So while we await the return of our King, we arm ourselves for battle. We watch out for each other and protect one another from the flaming darts of the evil one. Paul urges us to patiently admonish the idle,

encourage the fainthearted, and help the weak (1 Thess. 5:14). We carry out the mission together, inviting others to join the kingdom that will not be shaken. When enemies are in our midst—seeking to deceive and dismantle the kingdom—we drive them out. And when the battle seems bleak and our hope wavers, we remind each other that God has already won.

Oh, what a lonely road it would be if Christianity was only about our individual relationships with God! Life is full of trials and tribulations. Jesus warned that we will be hated and scorned for following him. Knowing that we are not alone is profoundly comforting. We aren't the first Christians to suffer for his name, and we won't be the last. We are citizens who work together, soldiers who battle together, and elect exiles who joyfully await a better place.

Together we are called to fight the good fight of faith. Together we are called to follow our King. And since we're still sinners who often fail to live this calling out, together we must repent and forgive as we strive for peace and put bitterness to death.

A Family

We become brothers and sisters the moment God adopts us into his family. There is no hierarchy of worth, no disparaging distinctions (Gal. 3:28–29). And though the roles we play and the gifts we bring to the church vary according to God's good design, we are bound together and equal coheirs with Christ.

This familial language isn't just an analogy. We are actually family. Those bought by Christ's blood are even closer than blood. This has massive implications for how we live out community.

As a family, we are called to love one another. It is a simple truth that is profoundly difficult to apply. When conflict arises within the church, it's easy to retreat into our corners, content to build relationships only with those who think and feel and act like us. Our Father isn't tolerant of such an attitude—what loving father would be?

One of the hardest parts of motherhood is when my children mistreat each other. It's painful to watch their partiality, their bickering, their pride, their harshness. Because I

love each of them so much, my heart aches when they sin against each other. How much more does it sadden God?

God calls us to love the family we have, not the better version we imagine.

When there is bitterness or anger or slander in the family, we “grieve the Holy Spirit of God,” who calls us to “be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another” (Eph. 4:30–32). Our Father is not unmoved by our mistreatment of each other, because he loves *each* of us with tender affection. We can’t choose to love some brothers and sisters while hating others, because “whoever loves God must also love his brother” (1 John 4:21). As God’s children, we are called to reconcile, to cover offenses, and to seek his help when working through our inevitable dysfunction.

Speaking of dysfunction, it is nothing new. Sometimes we romanticize the New Testament church, remembering only its power and none of its problems. There is no denying God’s transformative work among the early Christians and the example it sets for us today: they exhibited boldness in persecution, remarkable generosity, and evangelistic fervor. Yet they had plenty of dysfunction too: sexual immorality, divisions, dissensions, false teachers, prejudice, conflict, and lawsuits. This is helpful to remember, because if we conjure an idealized version of the church, we’ll be disillusioned when ours inevitably falls short.

Every local church has baggage. Though it’s right to be concerned for the holiness, doctrinal purity, and missional faithfulness of our churches, we must extend plenty of grace toward its failures too. God calls us to love the family we *have*, not the better version we imagine. Dietrich Bonhoeffer insightfully wrote:

Every human wish dream that is injected into the Christian community is a hindrance to genuine community and must be banished if genuine community is

to survive. He who loves his dream of community more than the Christian community itself becomes a destroyer of the latter, even though his personal intentions may be ever so honest and earnest and sacrificial.¹

Only through committed love for our brothers and sisters will we resemble our Father's love. If we bail during conflict, if we are slow to forgive, if we are quick to gossip, and if we "bite and devour" one another (Gal. 5:15), how are we any different from the world? Living as brothers and sisters doesn't mean that there is an absence of discord, but that there is a commitment to work through it. After all, that's what helps a family grow closer. Our relationships become deeper and sweeter and stronger the more we bear with one another in love. Treating each other as family is costly, but it brings great comfort too—eternally tied together, we *can't* just give up on each other!

Notes:

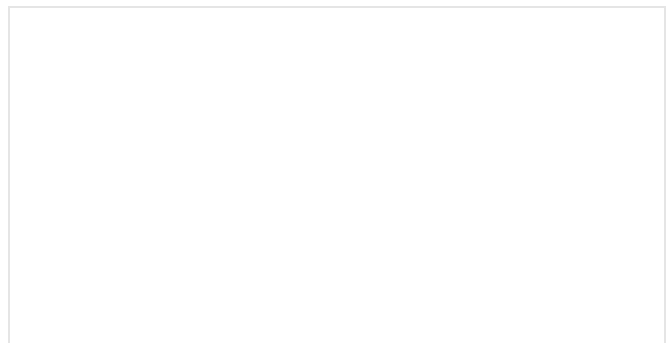
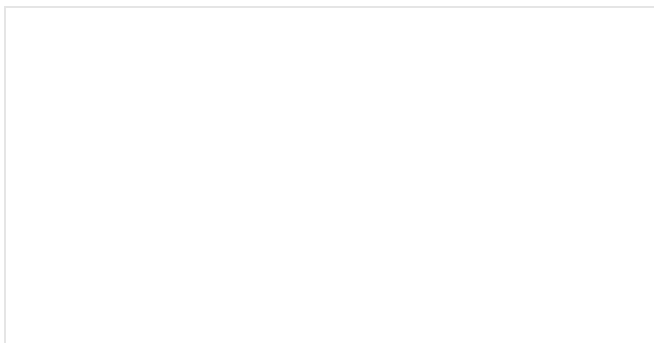
1. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together: The Classic Exploration of Christian Community*, trans. John W. Doberstein (New York: HarperCollins, 1954), 27.

This article is adapted from A Hunger for More: Finding Satisfaction in Jesus When the Good Life Doesn't Fill You by Amy DiMarcangelo.



Amy DiMarcangelo is the author of *A Hunger for More* and *Go and Do Likewise*, as well as the forthcoming devotional, *Wisdom for Fighting Sin*. She holds an MA in theological studies from Westminster Theological Seminary and lives in New Jersey with her husband and three children.

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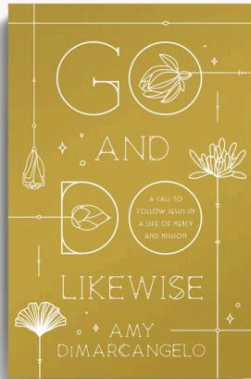
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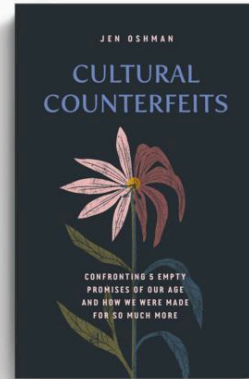
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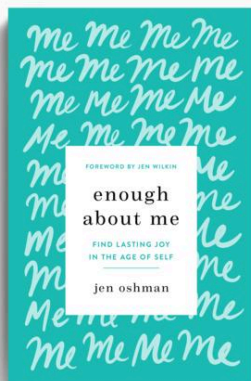
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