

MAKING ROOM FOR LIFE – Trading Chaotic Lifestyles for Connected Relationships.

By Randy Frazee, Zondervan 2004.

Note to reader: I have chosen to summarize more of the foundational ideas to the book than the individual applications from the author. Much thanks to my teammate and wonderful wife Ruth for typing this up! If you haven't read the book and the following makes sense to you – get a copy, there is much more than what you see here!

Managing Your Relationships.

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. 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.

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 a 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. Also, many people have a large group of 'friends', but in reality most of them are mere acquaintances.

Created For Connection.

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.*

We are built with a connection requirement.

When we open the New Testament, we often read it in light of our individualism, reading a "me Theology" into what is written. In reality though, it is 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". We have exposure to people but not a deep connection to people.

The Secret of the Bedouin Shepherd: The Solution Is Not More of the Same.

The average Bedouin lives to be over one hundred years old! The secret – no stress. Whatever work to be accomplished is done during the day before the sun sets. Each night the family gathers for dinner. 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.

What is the secret of the Bedouin? The Bedouin approach *relationships* and *time* in a manner completely different from the way we do. 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.

Make this note: *This lifestyle cannot be bought with money.*

The Circle of Life – Restructuring our Relationships.

The Linear Model.

In a linear relational model, you run from one relational unit to another. You go to work; you call your father or sibling on the cell phone; you golf on Saturday with a group of guys; you attend your son's soccer game; you meet with your financial adviser; you answer an e-mail from a former coworker; you go to church. As you exit one world and enter another, there may be some mention of the people you just left behind, but essentially they are not connected to the present world in any meaningful way.

The most damaging aspect of linear friendships is that no one really knows the real you. *A person doesn't really know you unless they know most of the people in your other circles.* Because the most important thing about you is the relationships you have – your relationship with God and your relationship with others. For community to be authentic and strong, people have to share in those relationships with you.

Two-thirds of all people who struggle with stress cite loneliness as their major problem, even though hundreds of people surround them each day. This is called *crowded loneliness*.

The Circle of Relationships.

What the busy modern-day person needs in order to bring a deep sense of belonging to his or her life is a circle of relationships – a collection of people of all ages and stages who daily flow in and out of each other's lives. It is an extended family of spiritual aunts, uncles, grandparents, nieces, and nephews who are committed to living out their faith in a simple, radical and intentional way. This circle of friendships can also include those who don't live by faith in God but still share in the daily life experiences of a person.

The sayings of Solomon offer us this wise counsel: "Do not go to your brother's house when disaster strikes you – better a neighbour nearby than a brother far away". (Proverbs 27:10). In today's vernacular, Solomon is saying, "If you're having trouble and you have to get in a car to find help, you are in more trouble than you know".

This is the version presented in *The Connecting Church*, which recommends that we move beyond commuting to small group events in search of "contrived community" to living in a circle of relationships with the people nearby – the place where community can truly happen.

Today we are over stimulated with people exposure, which affords us surface contact at best. This has many negative effects on our lives, including some of today's modern disorders and phobias.

Because we are inundated with the sight of people and "sound bite" contacts, we often don't see clearly that we need deep encounters with only a hundred people or less.

The power of place-based community is that it creates the most tangible circle of relationships – the place where every one of various ages and backgrounds knows you and can also know each other.

While the neighborhood structures in suburbia are a far cry from those functioning for centuries in small villages around the world, which also included workplaces and marketplaces within that circle, it is still the best "center place" for facilitating community I know.

The Hebrew Day Planner – Restructuring Our Time.

While we may and can use a day planner to aid us in managing life, what we first need in advanced and more educated cultures is something more basic. Most people today have a daily and weekly pattern that is unbalanced and not sustainable over the long haul.

I'd like to recommend to you an ancient concept that may be new to you. I'm calling it "the Hebrew Day Planner". This concept is rooted in the creation theology of Genesis 1 and 2.

The basic premise of the Hebrew Day Planner is that we were designed by God on the sixth day of creation to function in harmony and rhythm with what he created on the first five days.

There are essentially three major activities in each day that should be governed by night and day: *productivity, relationships, and sleep*. There is a correlation between night and day that is divinely created in our being.

- Productivity happens between 6 am to 6 pm.
- Relationships- time with family, friends, sharing a meal etc., slowing oneself down for sleep happens between 6 pm to 10 pm.
- Sleep – 10 pm to 6 am.

God again reveals a key design requirement of the human model. We function at peak performance when we take one day a week to rest and replenish. If we violate this design, we are abusing our bodies and soul, and little by little we diminish our effectiveness. So important was this principle for living that God modeled it himself by taking the seventh day for rest.

This is the divine plan established at creation to give us the room we need to live healthy, balanced lives. This, I think, is one of our most pressing issues. If we don't address it, we must not expect to ever truly live the life God intended us to experience.

Getting Life Out of Balance – The Need for Boundaries.

Work Imbalance.

If work could be grabbed with our hands, we should seek to take only one fistful of work, and in the other we should grab a handful of tranquility. This is a fifty-fifty proposition. Fifty percent of our day should be given to work and production – this is good. Fifty percent of our day should be given to relationships and sleep – this is also good and necessary. It is a matter of balance.

Sleep Imbalance.

In the end the problem is the way we live our lives when we are awake. Lack of sleep is not only the *effect* of living in stress but also (in some cases) the *cause* that throws the other areas of our lives out of whack. Lack of sleep ultimately creates health problems that affect our productivity. Lack of sleep can destroy relationships because it creates an internal imbalance that makes us unhappy, irritable people.

While I want to achieve all that God wants me to achieve, and I surely do want my life to count, I have come to realize that God has established boundaries we must adhere to – a rhythm, if you would, that keeps us healthy, happy and productive.

Childhood: An Endangered Species; How our Lifestyles Affect Our Children.

We are slaves to schedules, accumulation, and automobiles. A key observation is that this evening chaos is primarily driven by the children's activities. This is what I call "the juvenile suburban dance." Here is the primary question: *Is this what the children really want or need?*

The Lost Art of Play: Seven Ways Our Children Are Losing

Seven Deadly Sins.

The way we are raising our children in stereotypical suburbia is taking its toll as we commit at least seven deadly sins against them. Dragging our children away from home in the late afternoon and evening hours to transport them to adult-driven, highly structured age-graded activities has these negative effects.

Lost creativity: If a child has been raised with overextended and structured evening activities, they are ill equipped to know what to do if free time comes along.

Lost leadership skills: They really have few opportunities to manage their activities on their own. By directing the activity, you learn how to negotiate rules. You learn to referee yourself. You learn how to take control and exercise leadership.

Lost mentoring: Most kids only play with children their own age under a concept that could be called “arranged friendships”. This “mono-generational” play system involves a high commitment to scheduling and chauffeuring on the part of parents and wipes out the value that comes from intergenerational mentoring (ie. Young teens playing with elementary aged kids).

Lost conflict management skills: If a conflict or tiff emerges on the playing field, the adults jump in quickly, often demonstrating that *they* haven’t learned much about conflict management either.

Lost health: Many children today are overscheduled. While they undoubtedly benefit from a variety of activities, children can suffer from burnout and over-commitment and experience stress just like adults.

Lost finances: Funding all of the activities of the children can be stressful for parents to sustain. Once our children’s world is framed in this method, it is difficult to exit or “get out” – at least partly because there seems to be no other option. So parents live with the stress of striving to finance the plan.

Lost family meals: The family meal is the centerpiece of the day, the place where family and often friends sit down and talk, catch up on the day, and tell stories. The table is the heart of community.

Ten Principles of Productivity – Getting Work Done at Work.

1.Goal Setting. Without question, well-defined goals can be used not only to get work accomplished but also to get you home on time.

2. the To-Do List. We must create a daily to-do list from these stated goals a day or even a week in advance. Remember, the goal is to be a responsible steward for God, your employer, and your family by being productive during the work hours so you can be faithful to enter into the relationship season (6:00 p.m. – 10:00 p.m.) successfully without feeling guilty.

3. Four-Hour Principle. Specialists tell us that there are only four hours worth of highly productive labor for each day. We should seek to consolidate our four hours of effective work within the tightest framework we can – six to eight hours of work per day certainly seems achievable.

4. Giftedness. You are the most valuable and productive when you work in your area of giftedness, and you are most fulfilled and efficient too. Therefore, we should seek to work the greatest portion of our day within the scope of our giftedness.

5. Delegation and Teamwork. If teamwork could be formed on the basis of a balance of gifts, and if everyone knew and respected each other's gifts and unique contribution, more work could be done in less time.

6. Positional Identity. When a person is secure in who he or she is, and positively seeks to express it through work, there is a greater likelihood of avoiding addiction to work, praise or competition.

7. Commute Reduction. If at all possible: move closer to work, go to and leave work when traffic is light, use public transportation, work at home or change jobs.

8. Results for Flexibility. Allow for flex hours. My assistant promises to deliver defined results while I offer her flexibility.

9. Outsourcing. Why do outsourcing services such as housecleaning and yard work sound lavish and pretentious but owning a brand-new automobile that depreciates in value daily seem like a nonnegotiable purchase and the inalienable right of all Americans? I would like to suggest that the journey of making room for life – of moving from accumulation to conversation – sees things differently. (Time is priceless)

10. Efficiency. This principle seeks to perpetually answer this question about all we do at work: *How can this be done in less time?*

Work is an important ball to juggle, but we must remember that it is only a rubber ball, while family, health, friends and integrity are balls made of glass. Or, to say it another way, the goal of these principles is not to make a living but to make room for living.

Discovering the Convivium – The Importance of Sharing a Meal.

The Meal: The “convivium” is the Latin word for “feast”. Discovering the convivium is at the core of trading accumulation and activity for conversation and community as a way of life. With this vision, the house becomes a place of safety, replenishment, and refuge with a cover on it. In simple terms, to miss the meal, or to rush it, can only spell failure. If we are to make room for life, we must rediscover the convivium. We must return to a time when food is placed back on the table – and it is worth eating slowly – and where conversation is not rushed.

Food Preparation: One of the keys to a good meal is that it must be wholesome and good for the body, but doesn't have to be elaborate or fancy. This food preparation can be shared. If you can't

cook, find a handful of simple recipes that are wholesome and good for you, cook in large quantities, and freeze some meals. Another option may be to share a meal with neighbours (or your small group). The workload is spread out and the conversation is expanded.

On Saying Grace: So many positive things begin while seated at the dinner table – respect, good communication skills, proper table manners, the humble thanking of God for our blessings.

The Art of Dinner Table Conversations: Here is how it works in our family. After we have said grace and the food is on each person's plate, we simply tell about our day. Each person starts with the time they got up and then chronologically unfolds the details. One night a week we have a biblical or spiritual discussion.

The First Church of the Neighbourhood – Bringing Church Home

The majority of American churches establish their connections in small groups based on a contractual theory. The same dynamic happens when forming small groups. We contract with others to be in our small group based on an upward association and invitation. In the end, these kinds of social contracts fail and lose their sizzle because they are contrived from the beginning.

My first principle of authentic community: It breaks out when you can sit in a room together and enjoy each other's presence but not feel a need to always talk.

My second principle of authentic community: Drawing people into a circle of friendship involves not only helping out but also reaching out. People want to know they are needed.

My third principle of authentic community: It happens best when we spend frequent and spontaneous time together.

The contractual theory is not authentic but the communitarian theory is. This theory suggests that when we give ourselves to the people around us, even though there is diversity that we may not be attracted to, authentic community has a real opportunity to be experienced and found to be very desirable. While the neighbourhood gatherings looked more like a scene out of *My Big Fat Greek Wedding* than a traditional small group meeting, at the core there was a growing spiritual depth. It took seven years for this to become a new part of the DNA of our church.

Lee Schaller, a wise sociologist and popular church consultant, said several years ago that "the biggest challenge for the church at the opening of the twenty-first century is to develop a solution to the discontinuity and fragmentation of the American lifestyle."

We set out our covenant of purpose with an acronym that spelled "S-E-R-V-I-C-E".

S – Spiritual Formation: We will help each other grow.

E – Evangelism: We desire for our neighbours to know Jesus Christ.

R – Recreation: We will have fun together.

V – Volunteerism: We will volunteer to help our church.

I – International Missions: We will help the church internationally.

E – Extending Compassion: We will help the poor and needy in our community.

A paragraph of advice is warranted here. Don't push aggressively on these activities. Let the fellowship emerge naturally, and let each person give his or her input. Don't refrain from inviting un-churched people to your home group or other activities. Don't hold back from praying or from discussing your growing relationship with God.

It has been my experience and personal observation that churches can complicate our already fragmented lifestyles. For most people who live in the sprawl of suburbia, church is its own world – disconnected for the most part from our relationships at work, in the neighborhood, and with the schools of our children.

The problem lies in the fact that this level of linear activity prevents you from having the time to invest in a circle of friends, which can help you meet the connection requirement. It is little wonder that the average new Christian loses all contact with their non-Christian friends within two years of becoming a Christian and getting involved in a church.

Life-Busters – Dealing with Homework and Sports

The important thing is that you are intentional and that you take action before your children are grown up – and it becomes too late.

Without question, America has become a nation centered around child activity – carried out, generally speaking, for the welfare of the child. I'd like to suggest, however, that the overstuffed, over-planned, harried, commuter-driven life-styles we are ingraining into our children are harmful. While our children should have lofty goals, dreams, and ambitions, they need a healthy lifestyle and healthy community in order to be able to achieve them. That's what this chapter seeks to encourage. Decide for yourself what action your family should take, and then do it.

A Word to Church Leaders

The church's relevance and growth will largely depend on her ability to authentically "connect" people to the experience of doing life deeply together.

We must see our private spaces – our homes – as centers for simple hospitality. *The Connecting Church* was written to help church leaders design an infrastructure that facilitates authentic community in the post-modern church. *Making Room for Life* is written for your people – to help them adopt a vision for a connecting life.

Want more info, including background studies and stats etc.? Go to www.makingroomforlife.com