

January 12, 2025

## We Are Part of a Beloved Community

“Friends love all the time. And kinsfolk are born for times of trouble” (Proverbs 17:17). Unfortunately, it seems we are living the opposite of these words. Our friends love us as long as we agree with them, and kinsfolk are born for creating trouble. In 2023, Surgeon General Vivek Murthy released a study entitled *Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation*. It recounts how between 2003 and 2020, the amount of time people spent with family decreased by an average of five hours per month, and time with friends decreased by an average of 20 hours per month. Social media and technology have significantly contributed to these trends.

Technology is not all bad. It can be used to connect people across the world who have similar needs or struggles. However, much of the content lacks meaningful social interaction and is diminishing in-person encounters at an alarming rate. The results are physical, psychological, and spiritual suffering on a wide scale, including more than a 60 percent greater likelihood of premature death.

We were meant to love and carry one another through life in all its joys and sorrows. God created us for one another and joined us in our humanity to reveal how God accompanies us, too. To “love all the time” means to love despite disagreement. To be “born for times of trouble” here does not mean to be the source of trouble but to be a companion through the trouble, unshakable no matter what. But sometimes it feels as if strangers are far safer than the ones we claim to love. Often, they are.

But amid all this bad news is good news. As part of the beloved community of Christ, we get to push against our society. The church stands to be a great antidote to this pandemic of loneliness. The best part is all we have to do is be ourselves! We must recall our identity as the body of Christ, where all parts of the body are welcomed and recognized as needed and useful. All we have to do is intentionally work at relating to one another. As we do, we will deepen our friendships and grow that enduring love.

We will know ourselves as brothers and sisters in the family of God, and we can better navigate the times of trouble. Yes, we have our divisions to overcome, but let’s do that hard work. Let’s become the friends and family that the world needs so desperately today. Our lives depend on it.

1. What friendships or family relationships are strongest for you?
2. Where do you feel most at home?
3. How do you see the church as “the beloved community”?

Adapted from *Daily Bible Studies*, Winter 2024–2025, by Timothy Merrill (Cokesbury, 2024).