



STUDY + SEE

Jennie Allen

FIND
YOUR
PEOPLE

Building Deep Community
in a Lonely World

SEVEN SESSIONS

FIND YOUR PEOPLE

**Building Deep Community
in a Lonely World**

A STUDY IN 7 SESSIONS

Jennie Allen



HarperChristian
Resources

Find Your People

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Requests for information should be addressed to:

HarperChristian Resources, 3900 Sparks Dr. SE, Grand Rapids, Michigan 49546

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INSTRUCTIONS AND EXPECTATIONS

WHAT DO YOU HOPE TO GET OUT OF THIS STUDY?

GET HONEST

This is going to get messy, but it will be worth it. We will be dealing with the things that make us most vulnerable to other people, and the things that make us lonely. God wants to do something with that. But until we recognize that we are in need of Him, and in need of others, we will miss what He has for us. If you are craving the idea of finding your people, perhaps you would be willing to consider a way to deeper relationships, even if it is costly. Be honest with yourself and honest with God. He knows all of it already anyway.

ENGAGE WITH YOUR SMALL GROUP

In a study all about God's plan for community, your community is going to be essential. You have kindred warriors at your side, fighting with you and for you. Pray, speak truth in love, and encourage each other to open up and be real. Be vulnerable and do not abandon those who are vulnerable with you. Prepare to go to war alongside these women. Keep your group a safe place to wrestle and discover and also a place filled with truth. John describes Christ

as being “full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). I pray that this is how your small group will be described.

“And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free”.
(John 8:32 NKJV)

COMMIT TO BEING CONSISTENT AND PRESENT

Commit to being present at your group meetings, barring an emergency, and arrange your schedule so you do not miss any part in this journey. Have your lesson and projects finished when you come to the group meeting (except for this one, of course).

GROUND RULES FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

BE CONCISE.

Share your answers to the questions while protecting others’ time for sharing. Be thoughtful. Don’t be afraid to share with the group; but try not to dominate the conversation.

“Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak”. (James 1:19)

KEEP GROUP MEMBERS’ STORIES CONFIDENTIAL.

Many things your group members share are things they are choosing to share with *you*, not with your husband or other friends. Protect each other by not allowing anything shared in the group to leave the group.

RELY ON SCRIPTURE FOR TRUTH.

We are prone to use conventional, worldly wisdom as truth. While there is value in that, this is not the place. If you feel led to respond, please only respond with God’s truth and Word, not “advice.”

NO COUNSELING.

Protect the group by not directing all attention on solving one person’s problem. This is the place for confessing and discovery and applying truth together as a group. Your group leader will be able to direct you to more help outside the group time if you need it. Don’t be afraid to ask for help.

STUDY DESIGN

For Group Study: In the first meeting, your group's study guides will be passed out and you will work through the Introduction lesson together. You will watch the video teaching as a group and have discussion based on the Conversation Cards as well.

For Independent Study: Each video teaching is included with your study guide. Simply follow the instructions on the inside cover for access to all the video sessions.

After the first week, each session in the study guide is meant to be completed on your own during the week before coming to the group meeting. These lessons may feel different from studies you have done in the past. They are very interactive. The beginning of each session will involve you, your Bible, and a pen, working through Scripture and listening to God's voice. Each session includes four projects you can do to further process how to live God's Word.

Don't feel as if each study has to be finished in one sitting; take a few blocks of time throughout the week if you need to. The goal of this study is to dig deeply into Scripture and uncover how it applies to your life, *to deeply engage the mind and the heart*. Projects, stories, and Bible study all play a role in it. You may be drawing or journaling or interacting with others in your community. At each group meeting you will discuss your experience in working through that week's material.

WHAT THIS STUDY IS NOT

We all are products of messed-up environments. Even with the best parents, spouses, and friends, we still have wounds from relationships. The hurt from these relationships takes work to process, and there are many great resources your group leader can suggest that take you deeper into the wounds from your past. I believe in the wisdom of Christian counseling, and there is a time and place for it. Christian counseling is a process I went through earlier in my life, and it truly brought so much freedom.

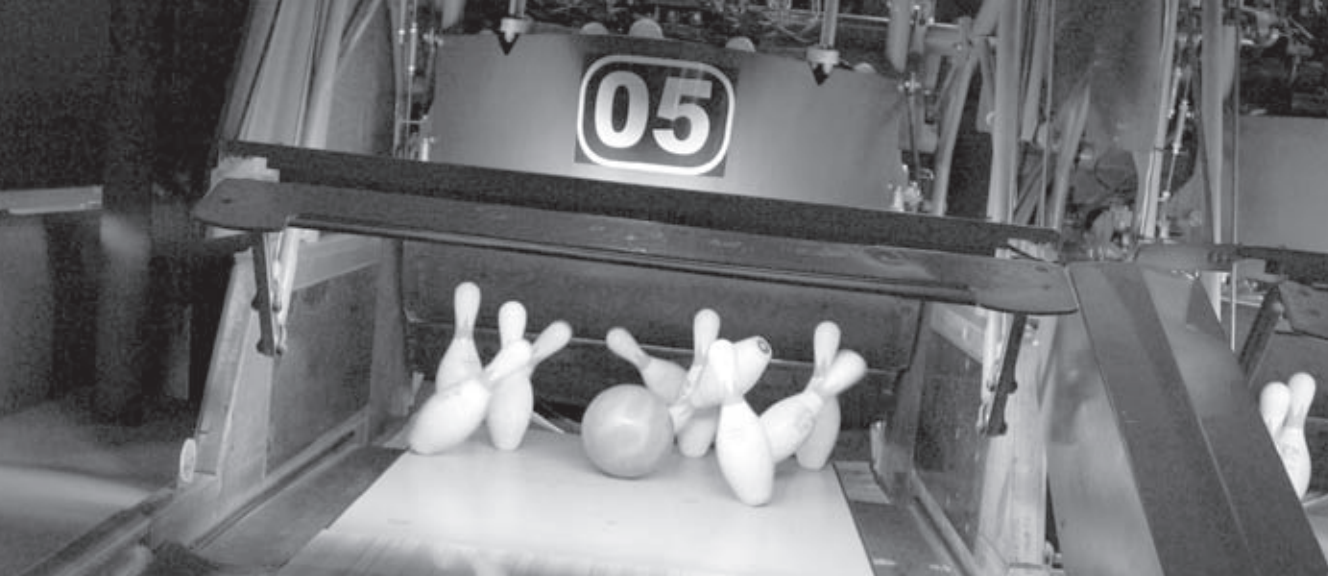
However, in this study the focus is intended to remain on God and His plan for us as a thriving community. I believe growing in our perspective of who He is and what He has for us changes the way we view our past hurts and current struggles.

“He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds”.
(Psalm 147:3 NKJV)

Nothing is more powerful than God getting bigger in our lives. He has the power to heal with a word. My goal as you walk through *Find Your People* is that God would get bigger for you and as He does, you would see a new way to do life, with others, and never alone.

SESSION 1

INTRODUCTION



Before this study was a study, it was a question. In fact, it was the number-one question I've gotten from you all throughout the years. And it's a big one: *How do I make friends as an adult?*

Of all the struggles we go through, this is the one that comes back over and over again because, let's face it: we've all felt that loneliness. Especially living in our spread-out world, which seems tailor-made for isolation and individualism. We're wondering: *How do I get deep with someone? How do I build trust with someone? Why is finding and keeping my people so difficult?*

And the kicker:

Why do I live lonely?

It's a question that hurts to ask, because so many of us would answer that question with, *There's something wrong with me. I must be defective. Or, Because it's the only safe way.*

But listen. It's not just you. This secret hurt and frustration is not so secret anymore. In this study, we're going to shine God's light on this place where we might otherwise remain in the dark—sad and isolated and missing out. We'll seek out His plan for thriving instead of settling for surface and shallow. But first I want you to know:

You're not alone in feeling alone.

When I first started doing my podcast way back in 2016, the whole first season was about loneliness. I wanted to hit this topic out of the gate because it was clear it was at the front of so many minds, and there had to be something we could do about this together.

So I asked people to email me, and answer, straight up:

Why is finding and keeping your people so hard? Why do we live lonely?

And these were some of the answers:

"I reach out, but people can't come over. They are too busy. I finally stopped asking." –**Amanda**

"After being burnt, backstabbed, lied to, and betrayed, I have a hard time letting people inside my walls." –**Patti**

"I don't know how to get past the 'getting to know you' small talk." –**Emily**

"I feel like a burden so I just don't go deep." –**Molly**

"I feel like I have to pretend that I am okay or be judged."
–**Stefanie**

"I have expectations of what I think 'my people' should be and they don't measure up." –**Sandra**

"I'm afraid I might need more than I can give." –Kim

"I'm too exhausted from being a mom, wife, employee to be a good friend." –Kennedy

"Staying friends after an argument is just too awkward. I don't know how to move past it." –Ella

"To be honest, it's easier to do it by myself." –Ashley

Does any of this sound familiar to you?

I know it does to me.

And for a staggering number of people.

In 2020, the pandemic opened a lot of our eyes to what we were lacking and missing in our relationships. But even before 2020, when people were sharing their stories with me, the pandemic of loneliness was in full swing. Taking us out. Killing our joy. Killing us physically and mentally. For so many of us, that ache has been there so long that you wonder if it is just the human condition and has no chance of going away.

But I don't think this is the case. I think, in this moment, something is being revealed to us: when it comes to community there is something fundamentally wrong with how we have built our lives.

We tuck into our little residences with our little family or our roommates or alone, staring at our little screens. We never want to trouble our neighbors for anything, so we build a small little crevice in the world with everything we could possibly need. We may feel comfortable, safe, independent, and entertained, but also, we feel completely sad.

I get it. Everyone does it. But this thing that everyone does is just not working for anyone. Research says that more than “three in five Americans report being chronically lonely,” and that number is “on the rise,” stats that are costly and grave.¹ Anxiety, depression, suicidal thoughts are all on the rise.

Is this living? Is this how life is supposed to go?

Before we get into all of it, let me skip to the answer. NO. IT ISN'T SUPPOSED TO BE THIS WAY!

There is a way to live life less alone. There is. It costs something, sometimes more than most are willing to pay. But it's worth it; it's doable; it's possible. Stick with me.

It is possible to live life connected—intimately connected—to other people. And no, we're not going to spend the next seven weeks figuring out how to build a new group of best friends.

1 Elena Renken, “Most Americans Are Lonely, and Our Workplace Culture May Not Be Helping,” *NPR News*, January 3, 2020, <https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2020/01/23/798676465/most-americans-are-lonely-and-our-workplace-culture-may-not-be-helping>.

Here is what we are going to do:

- ▶ We are going to look back at how almost every generation has lived until us—and how we are living differently.
- ▶ We are going to talk about community and all the ways it can be in our lives that maybe you've never thought of.
- ▶ We are going to look at what God meant relationships to be and how we have hijacked that.
- ▶ We are going to dream of a new way to find our people and to do life with them in more intentional ways.

My dream for you, God's plan for you, is to build a culture of community in every part of your life.

ON PURPOSE

Why do we expect close friends to somehow appear in our busy lives? We think our acquaintances should just magically produce our few best friends. *Then* our relational needs will be met. Back in the day, people found their friends from their larger village of interconnected people. Think village life, small-town life, or agrarian life, or tribes.

People's needs were met because of the way they lived: close. But because we see community as an accessory, not the essential fabric of life as our ancestors did by default, we are lonely. We are looking to plug a gaping hole. The hole is bigger than a couple people could ever fill, and so we live constantly disappointed, and we further isolate ourselves. It's time to break that cycle—on purpose.

THE BIG PICTURE

We'd all love to make a few new friends. But I have a bigger vision for you. God has a bigger vision for you.

I want us to trade lonely and isolated lives that experience brief bursts of connectedness for intimately connected lives that know only brief bursts of feeling alone.

Think I'm crazy? I'm here to tell you I'm not. I've experienced what I'm fighting for. I have observed with my own two eyes. And once you see it, you can't unsee it. You can't *not* fight for this kind of life.

But most everything in your life flies in the face of what I am about to invite you to do along our journey together. Specifically:

- ▶ Your routines.
- ▶ The way that you buy groceries.
- ▶ Your housing situation.
- ▶ Whether or not you live near your family.
- ▶ The church you choose to be part of.
- ▶ What you do this weekend.
- ▶ And deeper still: How open you choose to be about your sufferings. Your anxiety. Your pain.

-
- ▶ And whether you'll ask the hard question of the person you love who is drinking too much.
 - ▶ And if you'll forgive and fight for the people who have hurt you deeper than you could ever imagine.

It's a risk. It's all a risk to go deeper into this with me. But if you feel that ache for connection, you're in the right place.

STUDY ::

Work through these pages as your
Introduction to God's Plan for Community.

WHAT IS COMMUNITY AND WHERE DID IT COME FROM?

IN THE BEGINNING, GOD

When we look back in Scripture, we see how intentionally God designed us for and invites us to community. In fact, He *is* community.

God existed in relationship with Himself before any of us were here. It's called the Trinity. God is one, and God is three. (If this feels confusing, don't worry. It hurts my brain still, and I've been to seminary.)

The key point is this: **For all of eternity, God has existed in relationship—as Father, Spirit, and Son (Jesus).**

About the **Father and Son**, we learn in Colossians 1:15–17:

“The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.”

And Jesus tells us about the **Spirit** in relation to both of them in John 16:13–15:

“he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will glorify me because it is from me that he will receive what he will make known to you. All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will receive from me what he will make known to you.”

Scripture says that the Son exists to glorify the Father, and that the Father exists to glorify the Son. It says that the Spirit exists to glorify them both. What that means is: they help each other, they promote each other, they serve each other, and they love each other. What’s more, this exchange has been going on for all of eternity.

Our God created us *out of* relationship *for* relationship—and not relationship that is surface level, or self-seeking. No, the relationship He has in mind for us is

sacrificial,

intimate,

moment-by-moment connection.

Beautiful.

Relational. It’s who we are, because it’s who God is.

NEXT, FAMILY

First, God existed in community. Then we were created to join in that relationship.

We weren't just created *for* community, **we were created because of it.** We aren't craving something good for us, like vegetables or vitamins; we are craving the fundamental reason we were created: relationship.

Genesis 1:27–28 tells us:

"So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them."

"God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.'"

God's first community on earth is a family, a community "in his own image." Verse 31 says he called it "very good." The only "not good" thing in the creation account was the fact that Adam was first by himself:

“The LORD God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.” (Genesis 2:18)

And so God created Eve and gave she and Adam everything they needed in order to thrive on the earth.

They were naked, and unashamed (Genesis 2:25). No shame before each other, and no shame before God. Just free, beautiful love and the safety of authentic relationship. They shared the goal of caring for creation. They were given a boundary (just one) around the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (vv. 16–17). And they had all the time in the world to enjoy God, His creation, and each other.

Thriving, fruitful community was God’s original plan for humankind.

FINALLY, THERE’S HEAVEN

I like to think of Eden as a little bit of heaven on earth. In this brief moment in time, before sin entered, Adam and Eve were functioning perfectly as a microcosm of community. So, we’re going to look at what was going on there and discover how we can do it too. As Jesus taught us to pray, this is what we desire:

“Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven,”. (Matthew 6:10)

We are going to seek His will, on earth as it is in heaven. So what made Eden heaven on earth? What can we do to see for ourselves Jesus' vision, "On earth as it is in heaven"?

We'll discover five ways.



FIRE

Goal: Proximity
Barrier: Busyness



OPEN DOORS

Goal: Transparency
Barrier: Pain/Shame



ANVIL

Goal: Accountability
Barrier: Pride



SHOVEL

Goal: Shared Purpose
Barrier: Shallow/Small Talk



TABLE

Goal: Consistency
Barrier: Conflict

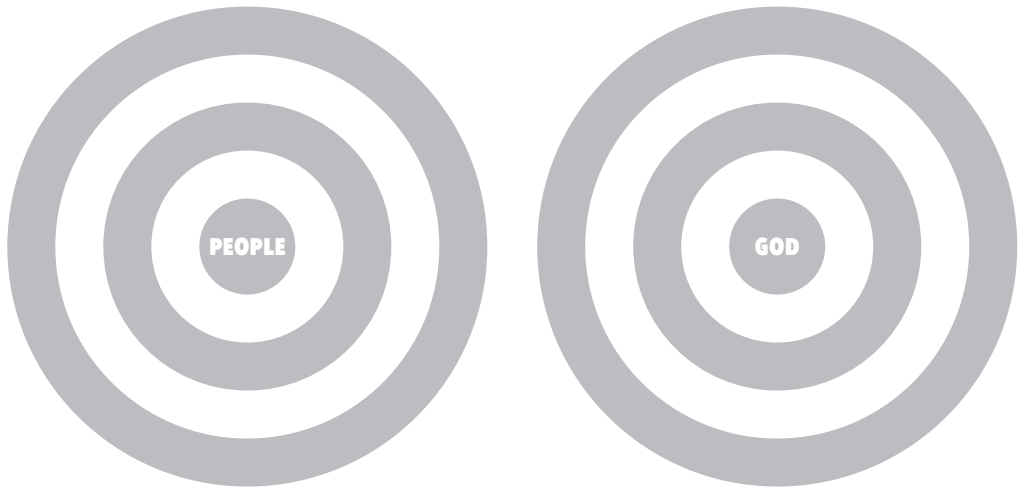
FIVE TASTES OF HEAVEN

Here's what we're going to work to reclaim together in this study. Five particular things characterized the healthy, balanced vision of community in Eden. They were:

- 1. Proximity:** Adam and Eve were with each other all the time, and they walked with God closely. (Genesis 3:8)
- 2. Transparency:** They were fully known and fully loved—naked and unashamed. (Genesis 2:25)
- 3. Accountability:** God set boundaries for them around the Tree, and they were accountable to Him for keeping them. (Genesis 2:17)
- 4. Purpose:** They shared a job, caring for God's beautiful creation. (Genesis 2:15)
- 5. Consistency:** They woke up and showed up every day, with all the time in the world to pour into each other—originally made to flourish without the brokenness of sin and death and conflict.

These five “tastes of heaven” are our framework. God gave us a model to follow here. **God established a perfect community that we can work to reclaim here and now.** These five things will be our goals in our time together. And we'll talk about what keeps us from them—and how we can fight together to get them back.

In this study we're going to build, step by step, a reality out of God's vision for community. That may sound huge and intimidating, but it's really made of small shifts and changes. And eventually you wake up and those small things



have made something beautiful. In the projects at the end of each session, I invite you to peel back the layers of your own experiences with friendship, community, and what you believe about God. This week, we'll do two short projects as a group to prime our hearts and minds to continue on this journey together.

Take a few minutes to reflect by yourself. How close do you feel to people right now? How close do you feel to God/Jesus? Put a dot where you are on each bullseye.

- ▶ **Farther out/way outside the circle:** *Feeling basic lack of human contact/deep divides between you and others.*
- ▶ **A little farther in:** *Wading around, but it doesn't get as deep as you'd like.*
- ▶ **Approaching the center:** *Some good times, but often overwhelmed by experiencing hurt, conflict, humanity that is making you question the need for community or how much you want to give.*
- ▶ **Smack in the center:** *You've had a taste (or you've got a great community), but want to pull other people in. You'd like to see God's will come through community, for the healing of the world.*

We were built for God. And until we come to Him as our Father and friend, we will keep looking to people to fill what only God can. And yes, that relationship is first, but that relationship is meant to send us into loving others.

If you put God in His right place in your heart, you will more likely put people in theirs.

Charles Spurgeon wrote, "We shall not long have love for man if we do not first and chiefly cultivate love for God."

Because you've shown up for this study, I know you're brave enough to take a real look at this issue and not run away, pretending everything's fine. So, begin by taking a moment to reflect on and/or share your answer to these questions:

- ▶ *Why is this so hard for you?*

- ▶ *What are your hopes and expectations of these weeks together?*

CONCLUSION

HOW WE WERE BUILT TO LIVE

The great thing about it is, this isn't just about us feeling better right now. It's about forever—for everyone. It's God's plan to reach his people—essentially, to save the world. Big stuff. But it starts small.

Do you believe that true, radical connection is what you were built for? Does this sound possible? Read each of the following bullets into the middle of this sentence and think about your answers.

Do . . .

- ▶ long conversations with people who have known you for years
- ▶ people who drop by with food unannounced
- ▶ regular unscheduled and unhurried meet-ups with people who feel like family
- ▶ people who show up early to help you cook and stay late to clean up
- ▶ people who hurt you and who you hurt (but you work through it instead of quitting each other)
- ▶ people to live on mission, who challenge you and make you better
- ▶ people who are your people, and you are theirs

. . . seem impossible?

It's possible. All of it.

SEE ::

Watch Video Session 1 now.

Use streaming code on inside cover or DVD.

SESSION 2

THE DISRUPTION OF COMMUNITY



WHAT HAPPENED TO GOD'S ORIGINAL PLAN?

I think it was sometime in 2014 when the thought occurred to me that I didn't have any friends. I should clarify: I had plenty of friends, but those friends and I all had very full lives, which meant that our interactions were erratic—and rare. Back then, I was traveling a lot speaking and doing ministry, and while being on the road provided plenty of life-giving interactions with other women, reentry at home often came with a sting. Did any of my “friends” even realize I'd been gone?

This wasn't my friends' fault, of course. They had lives of their own. In fact, they likely were asking the same questions of me: “Does Jennie even know what is going on in my life? Does she even care?”

Isn't this familiar? **We all are just kind of waiting.** Waiting for connection to find us. We are waiting for someone else to initiate. Someone else to be there for us. Someone else to make the plans or ask the questions.

My friend and neuro-relational expert Curt Thompson says it this way, “Every newborn comes into this world looking for someone looking for her.” And that never quits being true.

You and I are both a little needy.

God built us this way, in fact.

And yet it's hard to need people. No, it's *terrifying* to need people, because sometimes when we do, it feels like they're not there.

THE “MIDDLE OF THE CRY” FRIEND

I have a friend, Lindsey, who calls me in the **middle** of her good cry, when she’s hurting, raw, confused about why she is even so sad. **She lets me into the mess of that moment because she knows that suffering alone will only make the suffering worse.** When I cry, I get it all out of my system and then maybe call a friend the next day. Because I hate how needy I actually am. **I am embarrassed in my brokenness, and I wonder if anyone would really want to be in the middle of that good cry with me.**

Which is ironic, because I love when Lindsey calls me crying. It makes me feel needed, and who doesn’t want someone to need them? So why do we keep trying to pretend that our need isn’t real?

I think it’s because it’s messy.

We’ve replaced intrusive, real conversations with small talk and soul-bearing, deep, connected living with supper clubs and book clubs—because the superficial stuff is less messy. But lonely or deeply connected life is messy. Jesus knew it.

“In this world you will have trouble,” He said in John 16:33.

We were never meant to do the mess of trouble here alone—sobbing our way through, alone on a bathroom floor. The magic of the best of relationships *is the mess*, the sitting-on-the-floors-of-bathrooms-together, hugging-and-sobbing mess.

Hiding my neediness is actually a painful topic for me. It always has been.

I've hurt people.

They've hurt me.

I have failed relationships with people I know I have hurt. Some have forgiven me, and some have walked away. I am certain that if they knew I was doing a study about friendship, some would shake their heads and roll their eyes.

They'd be right. As I say, I'm better than I used to be, but I'm far from perfect here. And yet I'm going to keep at it. Why? Because the more I look into the why of our neediness and the problem of our loneliness, the more convinced I am that at our core, we are made to be fully known and fully loved. Loved and known regularly and over time by people in our day-in, day-out lives, not just once in a while in the presence of a paid therapist.

HOW DID THINGS GET SO BROKEN?

I am betting I'm not the only one who doesn't like to bring my mess. Who prefers to isolate and hide. Apparently, it's what people have been doing from the very beginning of time.

This week we'll read about Adam and Eve, how they got themselves in a mess, and how they hid. Sin brought shame into the world. And you and me? We deal with the same thing every day, in our own ways.

Their enemy *hated* their thriving in that Garden. He slithered in and started his sabotage. And He hates our thriving today, so He uses the same old tricks to try to break down what God built.

Those fig leaves are still our go-to today, self-protecting rather than moving toward people in our hurt, covering our mess with a “doing fine here!” We are hurt, and therefore, we hurt. And the enemy calls it a good day’s work. Because our attempts to cover shame will never be sufficient—we’ll always keep running and hiding and spinning.

But there’s good news here. God doesn’t leave us this way. This is *not good* for His precious creation. He won’t stand for it. He comes to rescue us.

STUDY ::

Read Genesis 3

One of the most important tools you can possibly possess is the ability to sit down with only your Bible, pen and paper, and discover truth for yourself. I love creating tools to aid in that, but ultimately, I want you to be building this muscle as we journey together. So, before we go any further, we're going to focus on what I call the three keys to effective personal Bible study:

Observation

Interpretation

Application

Throughout this journey, I am going to give you the opportunity to practice each of these. I use them in each of my studies, because it's so important to build confidence in you to practice these skills in your own time of Bible study.

Before we dive too deep into chapter 3, do you remember this verse from Genesis 2?

"Then the LORD God said, 'It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him'". (Genesis 2:18)

Connection was God's original vision—connection with God and connection with each other, and God in the center. But the enemy *hates* connection. His strategic plan was to divide humans from God and humans from each other.

- ▶ *In Genesis 3:1-5, write out the lies the enemy uses to convince Eve to eat the fruit.*

- ▶ *What was his goal?*

- ▶ *What was Adam and Eve's plan to handle the broken relationship they now had with their creator? (vv. 7-10)*

- ▶ *What did they feel?*

- ▶ *In verses 8-13, write out the questions God asks Adam and Eve.*

- ▶ *What was His goal?*

Because God is just and because sin naturally has consequences, let's look at what the consequences for humanity became after Adam and Eve rejected God and His plan:

For the woman (v. 16)

For the man (vv. 17–19)

For the enemy (vv. 14–16)

Hint: The one to crush the enemy's head would be Jesus. (2 Corinthians 2:15)

Even in the midst of God's justice, there was a promise of mercy. That mercy would come in the form of a person, His Son Jesus. Knowing all that it would cost Him and knowing how broken humanity would be, life through Adam and Eve continues and is promised.

► *In verses 20–21, what does God promise Adam and Eve?*

THERE'S A REASON FOR THIS

If you are still thinking that loneliness is just your problem, and that something is specifically wrong with you as an individual, maybe it's a relief to think about the fact that there are reasons for this. Big reasons that aren't due to your personal failings.

- ▶ **There are sin reasons.** As we just covered, humans are prone to this.
- ▶ **There are historical reasons, too.** Modern life has brought a breakdown of the village structure, and our conveniences and technologies allow us to hide and be independent in ways never experienced before. American society is literally built to celebrate independence. It's pumped into us from childhood. But as good as it is to be "independent," there's another side to that coin. It can go too far.
- ▶ **There is an enemy** who is doing this to you on purpose, and who wants you to think something is wrong with you, so you'll continue to isolate.

There is no greater weapon the enemy uses to destroy our connection with each other and with God than **shame**. Shame is so effective because it accomplishes so much with one dark feeling. Just like Adam and Eve,

We hide from God and each other.

We try to cover it up and pretend we're okay.

And we try to justify why we just did all of that.

All we want is to be okay with God, ourselves, and the people we love. But something went wrong.

Satan. A choice. An apple. Shame. Immediate shame.

But of course, God found them.

God wanted them to come out of sin and hiding and shame and come back into relationship with Him. But God is just and righteous, and if He were to tolerate sin with no punishment, then He would be abiding that sin. Sin required payment, and the price was death. But he promised Adam and Eve in Genesis exactly what would come, which was the blood sacrifice of an animal. He covered them with clothes made from that skin. It was a picture of the gospel, that one day a blood sacrifice would be made to cover our sins once and for all.

This remains God's desire—that we would be in right relationship with Him. This is the story of God. He has *fought* for us to be right with Him. He loves us so much that even when we turn away from Him, He fights to get us back. He values us so much, and He has set us in our places and created us for connection and purposes that are beyond what we can imagine.

He did all of that because He is good.

He is so loving and powerful, and He wants to share Himself with us. And if all this is true, then we need never be in bondage to shame again. We have been made beautifully and totally free.

“If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed”. (John 8:36)

The reason the gospel changes everything is it's the only antidote on planet earth that eradicates shame. But we don't believe it—because how could we truly be forgiven and reconciled to a perfect God when we know deep down we're so jacked up?

We were dead, separated, and helpless (naked and ashamed), but:

“because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in our transgressions”. (Ephesians 2:4-5)

We live under this curse until we die—in our relationships with others, with ourselves, and with our God, unless the gospel changes everything about who we are and how we relate to our God and each other.

▶ *How has the gospel changed your relationship with shame?*

▶ *How has the gospel freed you from shaming others?*

You can never be at peace with other people disappointing you and with other people’s sin until you realize you need that grace that the gospel promised as much as they do.

Come Out of Hiding

“There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God. All have turned away”. (Romans 3:10–12)

This is the story of humankind. And you see the repercussions of that independence and division everywhere. But nowhere is it clearer than in our relationships. **Nothing hurts more, nothing steals our thoughts, nothing disrupts our happiness more than difficult or broken relationships with the people who were supposed to be there for us.**

But we all hurt. We all sin. We all push away. We all are guilty.

Nothing in my relational life has helped me more than coming to terms with these simple truths:

You will disappoint me. I will disappoint you. God will never disappoint us.

It shifts all the expectations from people to God, and God is excellent at handling our deepest desires.

Even after you find your people, those relationships will never be all you hope and dream them to be. Your people will be more hurtful, more sinful, and more disappointing than you wish. But guess what? You'll be these things too!

Hurting people hurt.

But equally true is that only forgiven people can truly forgive.

It's why I love the gospel. It is the only story in the world where God rescues us from hiding. He restores us and tells us that "there is now no more condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1). And because we are restored and have full access to our God again—a God who forgives—we have the tools to change the cycle of hiding.

WHO ARE YOU, LORD?



WHAT DO YOU WANT FROM ME?

Read Ephesians 2:1-10. In light of what you read, answer the questions above.

PROJECT 1

REFLECT

- ▶ *How would you really describe God right now? Not the Bible study answers.*
- ▶ *Do you feel close to God right now? Y/N*
- ▶ *How are these words causing you to feel close?*

PROJECT 2

CONNECT

- ▶ *Take a blanket outside, play a worship song, and have a conversation with God.*

- ▶ *Write about that experience. Here are four questions to ask God while you're on the blanket:*
 - ▶ What is holding me back from being close to You?

 - ▶ What am I not believing about You that's true?

 - ▶ What's holding me back from being close to community?

 - ▶ What am I not believing about having deep community that is true?

PROJECT 3

CONSIDER

- ▶ *What has been your deepest hurt in a friendship experience? How has that birthed a fear in you?*

- ▶ *Bravely think back on times you've been rejected by others. What fears or resolutions did those experiences plant in you?*

- ▶ *Now identify your greatest:*
 - ▶ Friendship fears:

 - ▶ Friendship rejections:

 - ▶ Bad friendship experiences:

(This is depressing, but I promise we'll use these for good.)

PROJECT 4

ACCESS

- ▶ *Look back to yesterday, when you thought of the ways you saw close community working in those five tastes of heaven. When was the one time you felt the MOST connected to community? (ex., camp, neighborhood, college, sports team, family reunions, etc.)*

- ▶ *What were the COMPONENTS that made that community possible? (ex., shared mission, proximity, outward focus, etc.)*
 - ▶ How much physical time did you spend together?

 - ▶ How did you have fun together?

- ▶ Did you ever work through conflict together? What was hard? What was easy?
- ▶ Did you have a shared purpose, and what was it?
- ▶ How well did you know each other?
- ▶ What kind of things did you talk about?

CONCLUSION

NO CONDEMNATION

Let me tell you the greatest way to fight shame:

1. Live aware of your weakness and sin.
2. Live aware of the endless grace of our God that covers it all.

When you are fully in touch with how weak you are and how much of a sinner you are, as well as fully in touch with the power of God to make sinners right and the grace of God to cover those sins, that is a free person. That is a person no longer bound by shame. That is a person who can dangerously go live out the calling and the mission of God in her life. Those are my favorite people to be with, too. I can say anything to them without fear, because they know there is no condemnation—they're in touch with their own sins, and they are going to give back to me the love of God. May we be those people, too. And may we disciple and make those people on earth. That is how the world changes: people truly free of shame. They are rare, they're amazing, they look and live totally differently—and they're contagious.

People like this are the ones who have called me out of hiding. If I'm a chronic fig-leaf wearer, pretending to be totally fine, some of these miraculous free people have extended their hands to me and invited me into a new life. But it took a choice to stop hiding. My small group, for instance, has started to crack me open like a nut—to be that village that doesn't quit and never goes away. At first, it was off-putting and uncomfortable. But then I realized, it was life to me. We're going to talk about building this kind of community in the coming weeks. But the first step in that process is realizing you're not alone, and it's okay to come out of hiding.

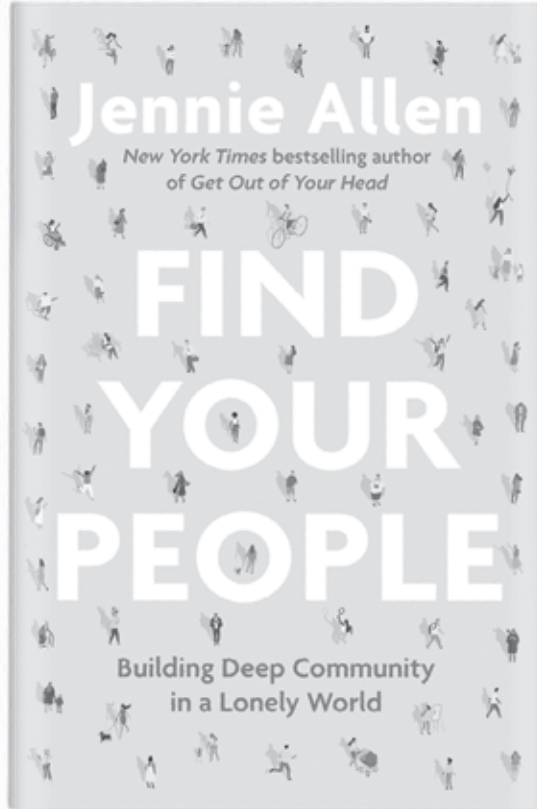
SEE ::

Watch Video Session 2 now.

Use streaming code on inside cover or DVD.

We Aren't Supposed to Be This Lonely.

But you don't have to stay there. Let's find your people.



You were created to play, engage, adventure, and explore—with others. In *Find Your People*, you'll discover exactly how to dive into the deep end and experience the full wonder of community. Because while the ache of loneliness is real, it doesn't have to be your reality.

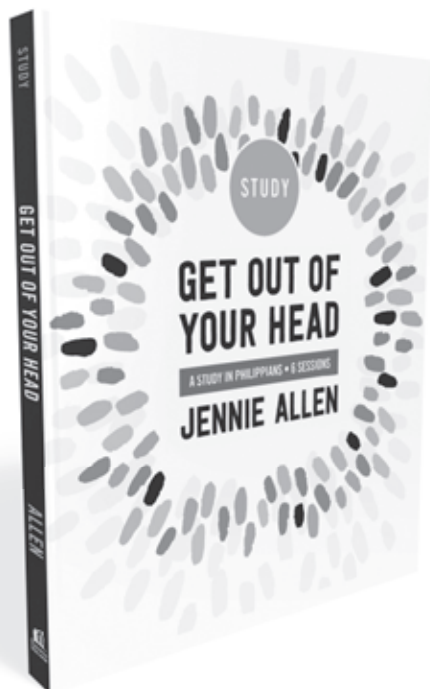
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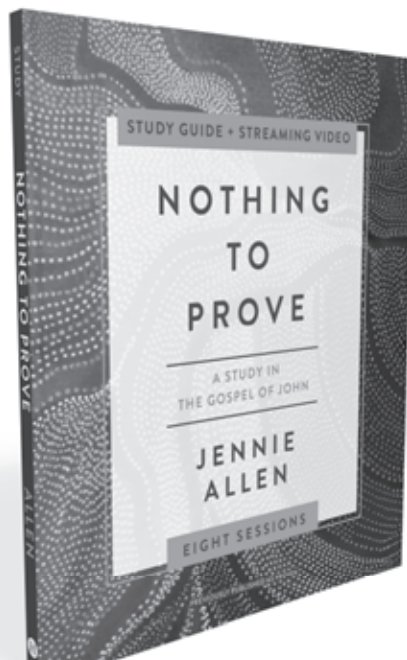


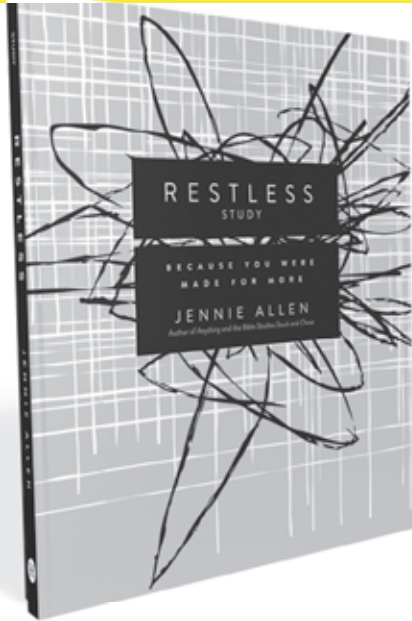
STOPPING THE SPIRAL OF TOXIC THOUGHTS

In *Get Out of Your Head*, a six-session, video-based Bible study, Jennie inspires and equips us to transform our emotions, our outlook, and even our circumstances by taking control of our thoughts.

YOU ARE ENOUGH BECAUSE JESUS IS ENOUGH.

In this 8-session study, Jennie Allen walks through key passages in the Gospel of John that demonstrate how Jesus is enough. We don't have to prove anything because Jesus has proven everything.



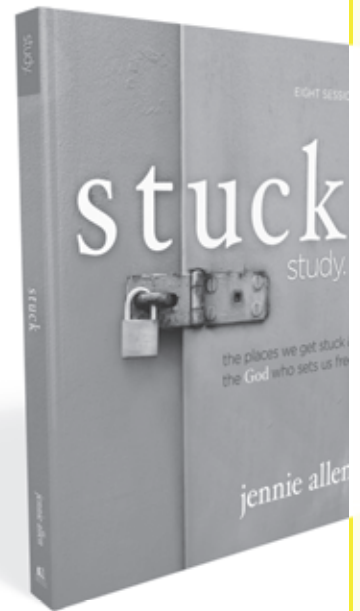


IDENTIFY THE THREADS OF YOUR LIFE

In this DVD-based study using the story of Joseph, Jennie explains how his suffering, gifts, story, and relationships fit into the greater story of God—and how your story can do the same.

THE PLACES WE GET STUCK & THE GOD WHO SETS US FREE

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CHASING AFTER THE HEART OF GOD

Chase is a seven-session Bible study experience to discover the heart of God and what it is exactly He wants from us through major events in the life of David, and the Psalms.

