

## **Drawing Strength from One Another**

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One of the wonders of the world is the Redwood Forest in California. Some of those trees are the oldest, largest, and tallest living things in all the world. Some of the trees are more than three hundred feet tall and more than twenty-five hundred years old. That's older than the Christian Era of human history! These trees have weathered the ravages of time, holding up against all the combative elements (except humans). They stand tall in spite of opposing forces.

When we think about how something so large and so old can survive, we might first guess that the trees must have a deep, far-reaching root system. However, studies have found that the redwood has shallow roots. How do they grow so large, and stand so long, against weather, disease, and time? The redwood's root system is shallow, but the roots of each tree grow out, and around, and interwoven with other redwoods growing close around. They stand together; they help support each other. When wind, and hail, and upheaval threaten, no tree stands alone, but rather each tree is strengthened and supported by others. Each is needed for the support of the grove. The grove is weakened by the loss of any individual tree.

The redwoods provide a fitting image for humans living in community. The individual person may be able to stand against a little or a lot of difficulty, but the individual can cope with more if the individual can feel the presence and support of others. For survival, each individual benefits from the strength and support of other individuals. In the community of human persons, each individual is needed for the support of the community, and, the community is weakened by the loss of any individual.

Sometimes events in our lives leave us feeling lonely, and alone, and, sometimes, we can even convince ourselves that we want to stay alone. But, like the redwood, it seems that the human person is not designed for solitary living. In a recent published study, two groups of persons were followed. In one group, each individual spent a specified amount of time each day in private, personal Bible study and prayer, and then the individuals would gather a couple of times each week for worship and for time together in community. In the other group, also, each individual spent a specified amount of time each day in Bible study and prayer, but there was no "gathered community" experience for this second group. The researchers documented an increased incidence of depression among the members of the group that did not come together as a community.

In the book of Ecclesiastes, in the Old Testament of the Bible, the writer states that "Two are better than one...for if they fall, one will lift up the other; but woe to one who is alone and falls and does not have another to help." We can help each other by choosing to live in community, but two fundamentals must be present: 1) we must be willing to offer help, and 2) we must be willing to receive help. As we think about the places where we are members of communities (i.e., home, work, church, school, etc.), let's remember the example of the redwoods, and how they support each other. May God enrich our living by increasing our capacity to give and to receive help as we journey together.