

Hi Everyone! So excited to be talking with you all today: I'm Emma, I'm one of the pastors here, I run journey groups and community life, and I'm also on the teaching team, and I'm going to tell you a story about Crazy Meatball Lady.

Now, okay. So when I was in grad school about ten years ago, I was very stressed out.

I was spending most of my time with people who were unbalanced because we all were consumed by trying to get into one of the coveted slots for the PhD program at school. We all thought all that mattered in the world was being able to get paid for dissecting two hundred year old works of literature.

I was commuting a lot to get to school. I was stressed out about my future. I wasn't seeing my old friends or family as much anymore. And on top of that, grad school was just the worst.

And then, one fateful night, I was trying to make meatballs for dinner and they were sticking to the pan and getting ruined.

Now some of you listening are probably thinking: "That's not a big deal. It's not like anyone died or anything." But look: it was pretty much the apocalypse at that moment. It just put me over the edge.

So I went from banging around the kitchen and being generally in a bad mood, to just exploding: slamming stuff on the stove, saying some very colorful words that are very inappropriate for sermons.

And my sweet, sweet, kind-hearted husband came into the kitchen. And he says, innocently: "What's going on it here? You've turned into Crazy Meatball Lady."

Now you can imagine how I responded to that. And I'm just going to let you imagine it, because you're probably right.

I wish I could say that was the only time my alter-ego ever surfaced, but sadly, it's not. Crazy Meatball Lady comes back to visit from time to time, and usually not because of meatballs. Crazy meatball lady comes back because my Bucket is Empty.

The day Crazy Meatball Lady came into being was at a time when my bucket was empty, and she comes back whenever my bucket is empty.

We're calling this series Bucket List, and we're calling it that because we all have life buckets that allow us to get through our day to day. But our buckets have holes in them: we pour out into others, we get leaks from stress, from serving and helping others, from working hard, from the hassles of modern life.

And sometimes we find ourselves with empty buckets, wondering how this happened. But we need to do something about this!

And the only person on this entire earth who can do something about this problem is YOU. YOU are the only one who can do something about your empty bucket. Only you can plug up the holes. Only you can put yourself under that spigot and allow yourself to get filled up again.

But how? What are some ways we can do this? How do we #putacorkinit?

On our first week, Mike talked to us about having a Sabbath: a day of rest. A day when we stop, drop, and roll, so to speak: put the fires of that week out, and recover, and do fun stuff, do God stuff at church, getting our buckets filled.

Then Kelly talked about how we need to take time each day to just sit in God's presence, as his beloved children, and allow God to fill us as we sit in this peace and know that we are accepted and loved. We slow down, we make time each day to listen, to stop "doing" and start "being." And that fills our buckets.

Last week, John talked about how we fill our buckets in the way we work and the way we play. We find our identity and worth in Christ's redemption, and our work and our recreation are worshipful acts by children filled with joy! And that fills our buckets.

And I'm wrapping things up with another way we need to fill our buckets. These other weeks really focused on the vertical: our relationship with God and how He can refill us. That's where we always start - we need to start with God.

But with all things with God, there are two sides, two things we need to be aware of: the vertical, which is about our relationship and standing with God. But the second is the horizontal, our relationship and standing with other people.

When God created humans, when he made Adam in Genesis, he realized he wasn't finished with that one guy. He said: "It is not good for man to be alone."

God wasn't done with creating earth until he created Eve, Adam's helper. And while we often point to this example and use of the word "helper" as evidence for marriage and how important it is (and yes, marriage is sacred and important), there's another element here to the creation of Eve.

Eve is called "helper" not because she's Adam's housekeeper (ladies, don't let any guy tell you that's what God was trying to do). The word for helper here is the same word used elsewhere in the OT to describe soldiers. These are preservers, people who are necessary helpers in battle to survive and win.

Adam could not live without Eve as his life helper. Adam needed a helper to fill his life bucket.

And this applies to marriage, but it also applies to ALL relationships. We humans are not created to be alone. In fact: IT'S BAD TO BE ALONE. It is not good for man to be alone - that's God talking. And when God speaks, we listen.

So, listen: don't let people tell you that if you're feeling lonely, or if you wish you were better connected to people, or that you want more community in your life, that that's a bad thing. It's not. The bad thing is that people feel alone. That's a problem.

But it's a problem that our society has come to think is acceptable. I was listening to the radio a few years ago, and in this program, they were interviewing people who were immigrating to the United States and asking them what they were anxious about and what they heard about the United States that they thought was weird, or odd, or even scary. And one little girl said something like this:

"I heard that in the United States, that there are people who are homeless, and don't have any family or friends, and don't have anywhere to live, and live on the streets and sleep on the streets." And the way she said it had that up-talk, like a question, like she couldn't believe this was a thing.

But what she's describing is something we've come to accept in our culture: Homeless People. She couldn't wrap her head around it. But I'll bet you a bunch of the kids in Kids Harbor know the word Homeless. And the reason why this girl was so confused by this is that in some other countries in the world, countries that aren't as rich as us by any means, there aren't homeless people because the family and community ties are so strong that it just doesn't happen.

But that's not the case here. Here, our social ties are so weak that homeless people exist.

Here, we're so technologically advanced that we could go an entire day, maybe entire weeks, without having a real conversation with someone. Or even saying: "Hi" to someone.

On some of my days off, I can go for eight hours without having a coherent conversation with someone - talking to the baby, dog and cats doesn't count, because it's pretty one-sided.

I can have things I need delivered to my door. I can work from home. I can email, I can text - I don't even need to talk to anyone. I can get my "friend fix" online, on Facebook. I've got a bunch of Facebook friends. They "like" me - they can write back, they can see photos of my life, my coffee, whatever. It's convenient, right? I like convenience, and I'm also an introvert, so I like being in my thoughts, I like alone time, I like walks with my dog, especially if I don't run into anyone and have to do that awkward smile thing or super soft "hi" or "good morning" - it's like if you say it too loudly you're a sociopath, right?

But I find that when I spend several days alone without doing much with other people, I start to feel weird. I watch too much Netflix. I sit flipping through Facebook so much that I have no idea how much time I spent on that. I get bored. I start to think too much about myself and what I

want and what I need, and what's wrong with other people. Do you find yourself doing that? It's easy to see what's wrong with everyone else when we don't spend any time talking to them.

And when we are isolated, bad stuff happens. When life-stuff happens, we despair. We think we're the only ones who've ever had disappointment and struggle. We think nobody else has ever lost a job. We think nobody else has ever been depressed. We think nobody else has ever had a fight with a spouse, brother, sister, child. We think nobody else has struggled with their faith or questions about belief. We think nobody else has had to face sickness.

Can't you just hear the buckets draining out?

But God said: "It's not good for man to be alone." So when we live our lives in a way that we're alone, that we're isolated from others, our bucket empties out.

We become self-centered and we don't care about others

We feel sad.

We can get tired.

So here's what I'm going to say is a final way you can fill your buckets: Relationship. **We refill our buckets through relationship.**

Okay, so some of you might hear that and say: "Ewww. No. Nope. Nope. Nope. In fact, a lot of my relationships make me more tired!"

And I am sympathetic toward that. Remember, I'm an introvert. I get energy when I get to spend some time alone, with headphones on and a good book. I know that some of you might be in the same boat. Or some of you have people in your life, family, friends, who demand a lot of you, and are exhausting.

But let's not throw the baby out with the bathwater. The real issue here is that you either aren't getting that important "Being in God's presence" time (which is refilling and important, and Kelly talked about that) or your relationships are not very healthy.

Honestly, I think we don't really understand what relationships are about. We have wildly unbalanced ideas of how relationships work. So I'm going to put my teacher hat on, and we're going to have our little checklist of Bible verses as to how we can have a more Godly view of relationships, see what God has spoken to us about relationships.

Step one for refilling your relationship bucket: We need to know this: Only Jesus is a perfect friend. In John 15:15 Jesus says: 15 I no longer call you slaves, because a master doesn't confide in his slaves. Now you are my friends, since I have told you everything the Father told me.

Let's stop here for a minute: how amazing is it that Jesus is our friend? Jesus, God, creator of everything, who knows us inside and out counts us as friends. And he's the only friend who won't ever let us down, who will never reject us, who is always with us. Jesus, Emmanuel, God with us.

When we forget this, or if we don't really get this or feel this, I think we expect more of other people than they can give us.

Show of hands: How many of you have had a friend let you down?

Okay, now how many of you have let a friend down? Yeah. I've probably let down more friends and family than I'd like to admit, but I've done it, for sure.

People are fallible, and have their own needs and limitations. Our human relationships can never be perfect.

But our relationship with Jesus IS perfect because HE IS PERFECT. People may let us down as friends, and we may let our friends down. But Jesus is our perfect friend. He won't let us down.

We can come to him and tell him everything with complete honesty and he'll never be hurt, he'll never say: "TMI, girl." Or "Whoa, dude, Put a lid on that. You gotta clamp that down, because, eesh! That's just... too much." Nope, he can handle it.

So to have a healthier view of relationships that fill us, we need to first remember: Jesus is the only perfect friend. If we expect our friends to be perfect and meet all our needs, to save us from loneliness, feelings of sadness and low worth and isolation, we're going to be disappointed.

But if we take these expectations, and look to Jesus, we will not only find our needs met, but above and beyond

We have to start there and find contentedness and comfort in that. Sometimes we expect our friends, family, relationships to complete our sense of self and meaning, and that's no good.

That hurts us and that hurts the other person. Like John said, the only way we can know true joy is through our identity as God's children, as a friend of Jesus Christ.

Your boyfriend does not and cannot complete you. Jesus Christ does.

Your marriage does not and cannot complete you. Jesus Christ does.

Your friendships do not and cannot complete you. Jesus Christ does.

Your family does not and cannot complete you. Jesus Christ does.

These are good things, but your bucket can only get filled if you start with Jesus. Your relationships will become a drain, a hole in your bucket, if you expect these other relationships to give you happiness, joy, and meaning. You start with Jesus, your perfect friend.

Fill your relationship bucket with a relationship with Jesus first.

Next, on to bucket list relationship filler number two: we remember: Real Friendship is Face-to-Face time. And I've got another verse for you to remember or write down. In Proverbs 18:24 it says: There are "friends" who destroy each other, but a real friend sticks closer than a brother.

I actually like the ESV translation of this verse more: A man of many companions may come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.

So what is this verse all about, and what am I getting at here, exactly? Why did I pick this scripture? Well, if you're anything like me, you're allowing quantity to replace quality when it comes to relationships. And the two things hurting our relationships today?

TECHNOLOGY and TIME. Technology and time.

So first, technology.

Maybe you don't make time to spend in real relationship or conversation with someone else. Or maybe you're replacing face-to-face time with Facebook time or online or text time. Or maybe it's a little of both.

Now this isn't a knock on Facebook. I like Facebook - I think the internet has done great things to help people connect and work and talk. If it wasn't for the internet, I'd have a hard time keeping up with friends who move far away - that's how I was able to have conversations with friends that were living in Australia for two years, with friends in Tennessee. I love Google chat. These things are great.

But here's the problem. How often do we allow these tools to replace the time we would spend with people in person?

I've got hundreds of Facebook friends. Woo-hoo! But not really.

This verse in Proverbs is telling us something important. It's better to have fewer friends but have real friends, close friends, friends that breathe life into us, than it is to have lots and lots of friends. When it comes to friendships, it's quality, not quantity that matters.

If you were to do an inventory of your friends, how many of them are people you would call if:

You found out you were sick with something serious?

Your kid was in big trouble?

You got fired from your job?

You were struggling with feelings of shame after a moral failing?
(Drinking/drugs/cheating/pornography/lying/cutting corners at work)?
I think our numbers shrink significantly when we think about that.

Have any of you seen the movie Citizen Kane? He kind of illustrates this perfectly. He was rich, he was a celebrity, people “knew” him, but he wouldn’t let anyone really know him and at the end of his life, he died alone in a huge house, wishing for a simpler age, when he was a child. He was an empty man with an empty home because even though lots of people knew who he was, he didn’t have that friend like a brother.

Now, I don’t know if any of you are in that boat right now, but I think we have less-extreme versions of that. Even though we’re more connected with one another than ever before, it’s easy to have lots of “small” friendships than strong friendships that are rooted in acceptance, love, and trust. The kind of friend you know would do anything for you, drop it all and come to help you if you needed it.

This sounds great, right? We all want to have good friends that are awesome, right? Real true friends? I don’t think any of you are listening right now and disagreeing with me.

But what might be happening is that you agree with me, and yet you don’t really have that in your life.

I get it. Like I said, we live in a culture that doesn’t value those social ties that much. And so we have something we’re working against, something significant. And that thing is time. Notice that I said: Real Friendship is Face to Face TIME. We have to make time for it.

That’s an obstacle just as big as technology. Maybe bigger. We feel like we don’t have enough time to make friendships, to develop and invest in friendships. The reason why it’s easier to make friends when we’re kids and when we’re in college is that there is time in our lives to make friends, and people are just all together, living in dorms, no job. It’s easier to make and keep friends.

I totally understand this. Something I find myself saying is: “I’d love to spend more time with people, but I’m just so busy!” which yeah, is kind of true. I have an infant, I work here at Harbor, I’m in the middle of a move, I am pretty busy lately.

But that doesn’t let me off the hook.

Because the real problem is that I use my time badly.

You know, I'm so afraid to truly find out how much time I spend on Facebook, in those little minutes of downtime. If I added them up every week, I'm sure that it would equal a coffee with a friend, a phone conversation.

And I have to admit something else that uses up even more of my time: "Hi. My name is Emma. And I'm a TV addict." I LOVE TV. I love watching TV, and then reading articles about it, dissecting it. I love talking to people about TV. My dad would call me Em TV when I was little. Binge-watching was made for me. And again, TV isn't bad - it is one of those recreational things that I really enjoy, in the same way I enjoy a good IPA... but if I drank as many beers as I did watch hours of TV, I'd be totally wasted all the time. Not good. I think TV is actually my bigger vice than social networking, although let's be honest: while I'm watching TV, I'm also on Facebook.

How ridiculous is that? Jeff and I will be sitting on the couch, watching TV together, with our phones out on Facebook simultaneously, and sometimes I'll even have my laptop on my lap, too, because I'm doing stuff on that, too. Ridiculous. Like, what do I think I'm doing?

Because if I let it, I could easily become a person with many friends who comes to ruin. I need to MAKE TIME somehow, to follow God's instruction.

I need to make time to hang out with my husband.

I need to make time to have dinner or coffee or phone conversations with friends.

And I am not good at this. I'm actually pretty bad. But friendships take work. Time and work. It's not as simple as we'd like to think. We need to make time, prioritize relationships in order to have life-giving, bucket-filling relationships.

We need to do this. We need to prioritize and make time for healthy relationships because Healthy Relationships Refill our Buckets

This is a big life-change. This may even be an inconvenience. All of us are already so stretched thin. I may be saying something that makes you worried or tired just hearing it.

But the pay-off is so great.

I think all of us can think of times in our lives when we've spent an evening with good friends, friends who truly knew us, who loved us, and we were surprised to find two hours passed in the blink of an eye. And even though we were worn out, tired, empty buckets before that, we left feeling energized, loved, filled.

That's what we're talking about. That's what God wants for us: He doesn't want us to be alone. He wants us to be His friend, and He wants us to be friends.

So now what? So yeah, let's all make friends - that's easy to say, but how do we do that? Like I said, it's not like I'm saying something super-controversial. I don't think I'm going to have a bunch of people lining up to say to me after the service: "You know, telling us to be friends with people, that's total bologna, and quite frankly, just plain offensive." Right? This isn't a tough message in that sense.

But it is tough in that it requires conscious action on our parts, and yet it can be hard to figure out what we can do, right? When we're little kids, we just go up to someone and say: "Hi, can we be friends? Want to play Mario Kart?"

I mean, nobody's stopping you from doing that now. And Jeff and I still like to play Mario Kart, so it might work for us. But it is different as adults.

But I'm still going to push you all. And myself. I'm going to push you to put a cork in it by refilling yourself through relationship.

We've been telling you to put a cork in it, and we have corks in the cafe that you can take that can help remind you, help encourage you to take steps toward stopping up your life-bucket so it can fill up. And maybe for you, this is the week you need to take one of your corks to remind you that you need to make time for friendship and relationship.

So here are some next steps.

So we've got corks still in the cafe as little reminders to put a cork in it. And here are some things you can think about when you grab one of those corks and figure out how you can fill your buckets up this week.

Maybe you need to repair a relationship. Sometimes, we have relationships that cannot be salvaged - we forgive, but because of abuse (whether it's physical, emotional, spiritual, bad boundaries, whatever), we just need to keep that door closed - that's okay. That's 100% okay. Sometimes, we forgive, but we cannot be friends or have a relationship with someone.

But we may have some friendships where that's not the case and we let things go because of a hurt or because there was a problem and this friendship turned into something draining instead of filling. Sometimes it's poor boundaries. Sometimes it's dishonesty. Sometimes it's bad communication. Maybe we're letting a lack of forgiveness get in the way of repairing that relationship.

But here's something you probably don't want to hear (I know I hate hearing it): A lack of forgiveness is one of the most draining things that can happen to a person. When we don't

forgive someone, that's like taking your bucket and taking the bottom out. So that makes an okay basketball hoop. But it's pretty useless for holding water.

When you withhold forgiveness, you're killing yourself. Seriously. It's not good for the other person, but it's DEADLY to you. So forgive. And if possible, if it's healthy, reconcile with that person. You may find that friendship starts to fill you up again. So take a cork and remind yourself to forgive.

Maybe you just need to prioritize and make time for relationship. Maybe you're an introvert like me and it takes a little extra effort to make time for relationship. Or maybe you're just a busy bee and at the end of the week, you find you just don't have time to spend with friends or family. If that describes you, I'd say, take a cork and have that be a reminder to set aside one hour this week to reconnect with a friend. Just one hour. And see how it ends up filling your bucket!

So first step to putting a cork in it: Forgive that friend. Repair that relationship.

Second step: Make time. Find an hour this week, and invite a friend for coffee, and put a cork in it.

But here's another possibility:

Maybe you need to take a cork as a way to remind yourself to prioritize relationship here at Harbor. Maybe you have friends and relationships elsewhere, but you don't have any relationships here at the church.

Here's a strong statement that might rub you the wrong way, but it's reality: You CANNOT follow Jesus without COMMUNITY. You cannot be a lone-wolf follower of Christ.

Don't believe me? Look at Jesus. He wasn't some wandering mystic who nobody actually knew. You know how we have these gospels, this New Testament? It's because people who knew Jesus, who were Jesus' friends, wrote down everything they knew about Jesus. Jesus didn't write those first four books. His friends Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John did.

Jesus had twelve friends who he lived with and spent time with. Yes he had alone time, too. But he spent almost all his time with other people, with his friends.

Lazarus, Mary, Martha, they were his friends. Jesus went over their house for dinner.

And we follow Jesus' example, and we also value friendship because it's not good for people to be alone. God said it. So we trust it.

So here at Harbor, we make room for relationship.

This week, we've added an attachment to let you know about the different ministries we have here that you could connect with. Men's Harbor, Women's Harbor, Young Adults, Harbor Student Ministry, and we also have Journey Groups that will be starting up again soon, in a few weeks.

There's info and a link you can use to sign up. Come to church the weekend of Feb 11th and 12th and find out more; we're happy to answer questions.

So Ministry Groups. Journey Groups. Even volunteering helps build relationships. All of these things can help refill that relationship bucket. Take some time to consider whether you need to put a cork in it by getting to know Harbor more.

It is not good for Man to Be Alone. It is not good for people to be alone. It empties our buckets. This life can be hard, but even when it's good, we were meant to be together. I want to close this message by reading something from Romans 12. I love these verses because they get at community and why we need it:

In Romans 12:15 it says: Be happy with those who are happy, and weep with those who weep. 16 Live in harmony with each other. Don't be too proud to enjoy the company of ordinary people. And don't think you know it all!

This is what it's all about. We are better together: we can celebrate and be happy with one another. We can cry, mourn with one another. It doesn't matter your status. It doesn't matter if you're married, single, young, old. Vegetarian or 100% carnivore. Democrat, Republican, Socialist, Anarchist. It doesn't matter whether you're a Red Sox or a Yankees fan... well, not TOO much anyway. It doesn't matter if you're a college graduate or a high school dropout. We learn from one another.

It's about the one anothers.

Let's put a cork in it. Let's Refill through relationship with one another. Will you pray with me?