



EXCERPT



**The Connected Life**  
*The Art and Science of Relational Spirituality*

June 28, 2022 | \$25, 224 pages, hardcover | 978-1-5140-0261-2

*"In The Connected Life, Todd Hall demonstrates powerfully that we are hardwired for close, empathic relationships, but we suffer deeply from our increasingly fragmented culture. Through compelling stories, research results clearly explained, and practical action steps, Todd helps readers learn how to build life-giving relational connections. This book challenged me and fed my soul. I heartily recommend it."*

—Joshua Miller, author of *Unrepeatable: Cultivating the Unique Calling of Every Person*

## We Are Born to Connect

As far back as I can remember, my mom suffered from depression and several other psychological disorders. Throughout the course of my mom's life she became relationally disconnected and more physically and emotionally unhealthy—at times even suicidal. This impaired the attachment bond she developed with my sister and me. All this meant that my mom wasn't very emotionally available while I was growing up.

The summer after I finished the fourth grade my mom left our family, and my parents later divorced. I saw her periodically, but she wasn't very involved in my life after that point. This caused a lot of pain and confusion for a nine-year-old boy.

Mirroring a larger US trend, a growing number of families in the 1970s faced a similar situation. I, like most of my friends, grew up in a single-parent family. I didn't know the term back then, but I was a "latchkey kid." I rode my sky-blue ten speed bike to school and back, and let myself into an empty house after school. Also reflecting a powerful US trend in the 1970s, my family wasn't connected to a church or any community groups, and we didn't live near any extended family. Rather than sharing life with extended family and friends, evenings were filled with an increasing amount of TV watching. I don't remember the family interacting around the dinner table, but I do remember watching *M\*A\*S\*H* with my parents in the fourth grade. For years after my childhood, I felt a sense disconnection from family, friends, and myself.

I realized later that the pain and disconnection I felt in my relationship with God was linked to these formative childhood experiences. Through my college years, in particular, I felt distant from God. I tried to numb the pain by criticizing myself—a subconscious attempt to limit the criticism from important people in my life. In addition, I used my faith as a defense to shield myself from pain. I did this in different ways: trying harder, gaining knowledge about God, and seeking a spiritual high. These approaches, of course, didn't work in the long run. In the end, they simply reinforced my experience of relational disconnection from God and others. This led to a deep sense of emptiness and lack of belonging in my life.

My story reflects our collective story of relational and spiritual disconnection, and the search for meaning in a fragmented, lonely, post-Covid-19 world. Many people feel this uneasy disconnection because the family unit and communities that teach us how to connect to people and to God have steadily weakened over the past fifty years. Sadly, relational and spiritual disconnection are on the rise.

You have likely felt socially and spiritually disconnected, lonely, and empty at times—maybe even a lot of the time. How, then, do you cultivate connection and meaning in the midst of increasing social isolation, loneliness, and fragmentation? Our sense of meaning comes from loving connections with God and others. We are born to connect and we need to belong.



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**Todd W. Hall** (PhD, Rosemead School of Psychology) is professor of psychology at Rosemead School of Psychology at Biola University. He is a faculty affiliate at the Harvard Human Flourishing Program at Harvard University and a founding partner at Flourishing Metrics. Hall is an award-winning researcher, focusing on relational approaches to spirituality, virtue, and leadership. He is a coauthor of *Psychology in the Spirit* and *Relational Spirituality*, developer of several widely used spiritual assessments, and codeveloper of the Flourish Assessment.

We receive love that ultimately stems from the beautiful love among the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, which has existed for all eternity. We then give that love out of gratitude for the love we have received; this becomes a virtuous circle. But sometimes we get stuck. There are forces at work in our culture, and in our hearts and habits, that disconnect us from ourselves and others. We may even tell ourselves that we don't need others. It's less painful to strive to make it on our own. But in our most honest moments we know that this is what we want and need: to know and be known, to love and be loved.

I wrote this book for you so that you might overcome this nagging sense of emptiness and cultivate the deep sense of meaning that comes from loving connections with God and the people in your life. Welcome to the journey of the connected life!

—Taken from the introduction, "The Power of Loving Connection"



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