



GOD'S BELOVED PEOPLE

“So you will be my people and I will be your God.” (Jeremiah 30:22, NIV)

DON'T BELIEVE THEM WHEN THEY TELL YOU that golf is an individual sport. You may keep your own score, but nearly everyone plays it in a purposefully social setting. If you don't belong to a country club, you probably belong to a men's or women's club that assembles tournaments for its participants to play together. And if you don't belong to a group like this, you almost certainly prefer to head out with the same bunch of friends each time you play—*your* foursome.

People like being with people. I don't mind playing alone, but I have a lot more fun when I'm paired with friends and we share the joy of the round.

As those who read the Bible and find God's revelation there, we recognize that this social proclivity is something God designed into us. More than that, he relates to us not only as individuals but quite commonly as groups who are called by his name.

This began with the ancient Israelites, the people genetically descending from Abraham, but united more so by God's direct leading of them through the dispensing of his promises and prescriptions for them. It was to them, when they were exiled in Babylon, that God dispensed his words through Jeremiah that a time of deliverance was coming and that these people would be his and that he, the God of all creation, would be theirs. A few lines down, he added this remarkable confirmation: "I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with loving-kindness."

Beyond the Israelites, however, God had a plan for all who believed. They would be united by the work of the Messiah, a death on the cross that purchased the salvation of all who call on his name. These people, the apostles wrote, would be known as "the body of Christ" and "a kingdom of priests." Again, God was relating to them in community.

Together we might call this social structure under God's headship "the household of faith." The family of God, brothers and sisters to one another, resides here, uniting for eternity the ancients of the Old Testament, the early church of the New Testament, and we who believe today!

Opening questions: Your network

To what golf groups do you belong, formally and informally? How about other social groups? What do these groups provide for you?

The thread of faith

Read Romans 4:18-25. How does this passage draw the line of faith between Abraham and those who believe in Jesus as the resurrected Lord?

Read Luke 18:1-8. How did the persistent widow demonstrate faith? In looking at the world today, how would you answer Jesus' question in verse 8?

The people of God

Read 1 Peter 2:9-10. How does this passage echo Jeremiah 30:22 and 31:3, and what new aspects of God's kingdom do you discover here?

What challenges do these passages offer you in your own walk of faith?
