

Last week I was speaking to Nelson, an employee of my school's food service department. He's from the Dominican Republic, and he was surprised to know that that's where my father's family is from. I told him that I was estranged from my father and his side of the family (see my ["Ghosts" newsletter](#) from 2/2/24), and he encouraged me to search for my family. The first and last time I met my father was when I was 11 years old, so it has taken me 33 years of healing to get to the point where I am willing to give time and energy to connect with my father's side of the family—family that was cut off because of abuse and mental illness.

I didn't understand how deep cutoff runs in my family—how deep it runs in me—until I read about it in [Steve Cuss's](#) book, "[Managing Leadership Anxiety: Yours and Theirs](#)." Cutoff is just that—the severing of a relationship. The story of America cannot be told apart from cutoff. A friend of Cuss puts it this way: "Our entire country's identity is around cutoff. The Boston Tea Party, the War of Independence, the constitutional amendments. America is America by a severe choice to not be with extended family. Our shocking history with Native Americans, African Americans, immigrants. The more I travel the world, the stranger I discover [how] American cutoff is."

It takes effort to re-member what/who has been cut off, and the act of re-membering—if done with sincerity—assumes a commitment to the truth. [DNA test companies, like 23andme.com, etc. have exposed family secrets](#), and caused people to acknowledge the way they remembered fundamental relationships—biological parents, biological siblings, etc.—may have been built upon a lie. I am grateful that my mother has been honest with me about my childhood and about my father. The challenge is choosing to love in spite of—because of?—all the brokenness, moving toward people as opposed to away from them. The gospel of Jesus Christ hinges on the truth that Jesus Christ came to earth to save us from the dismembering effects of sin, re-membering us to Himself. Without His example, coupled with a lack of awareness of the damaging effects of cutoff, it is easy to think of cutoff as normal.

We live in a culture where we can choose to cut off shows, ideas, people, places, experiences, family, friends, etc. at the click of a button; the cost of a plane, train, or bus ticket; or the changing of or blocking of a cell phone number, etc. Now don't get me wrong, healthy boundaries are critical, but so is discernment; if I find that I'm isolated from every person, place, or experience that makes me uncomfortable, maybe it's time to ask why!

In his book, [Subversive Sabbath: The Surprising Power of Rest in a Nonstop World](#), A. J. Swoboda writes: "Cultural philosopher Zygmunt Bauman has discussed the two kinds of community people often enter into in this modern world: 'peg communities' and 'ethical communities.' Peg communities, Bauman writes, are communities forged by disconnected spectators around a mutually loved experience like a rock concert or a sporting match. Their participation is a feeling or a sense around something shared. Ethical communities, in stark

contrast, are long-term commitments that are marked by the giving up of rights and service. In short, ethical communities are built on relationships of responsibilities. These are relationships formed by commitment, love, covenant, and even familial fidelity. One of the fundamental shifts in our social matrix is that our relationships are increasingly made up of the peg communities rather than ethical communities. The latter, Bauman articulates, do not play the role they used to in the making of human society (pgs. 67-68, Swoboda).”

Despite trends in society toward peg communities, there is still a need for ethical communities. Otherwise, society moves dangerously toward a model of family, of parenting, of living that is wholly centered around cutoff as opposed to responsibility, commitment, sacrificial love, fidelity, and covenant. A peg community mentality implicitly offers cutoff to any individual. Don't like the show? Leave! Book club getting dull? Find a new one! Spouse getting on your nerves? File for divorce. Hopefully, you see the problem with treating every relationship like a cable subscription.

The Temple Takeaway:

Have you experienced cutoff in your family? Where? When? How? With who? Which peg communities do you belong to? Which ethical communities do you belong to?