

It's easy to feel like who we are is made up of all the things we can offer people - we are worth the sum of our productivity and helpfulness. But what happens when we have nothing to offer? Do my friends want me just for who I am or for the value I add to their lives? What kind of a friend am I if I have nothing to give? It's terrifying to be vulnerable enough to admit that all I can give my friends is myself, but sometimes that's all I've got. How can we navigate friendships when we are all overwhelmed, burned out, and exhausted?

## THIS IS SUCKER PUNCHED

Have you ever felt like friendships are so hard because you have to be everything to everyone? You have to be available all the time? You have to be able to help at a moments' notice? I mean, you know that's theoretically not true, but the internal pressure is real. And I know we all just want to know that our friends are our friends because they enjoy our company and like us as a human, but there's that tiny voice that says we're only as good as what we can do for someone. Can we stop that? Can we decide, instead, to build deeper friendships? I hope you'll join us in my new course in October: *Courageous Community: Finally Create Vulnerable and Intimate Friendships*. We'll hang out once a week for four weeks, discussing how to confidently make new friends, go deeper with the ones you already have, and figure out how and when to do it. Registration closes TODAY and I'm not sure when I'll be teaching this course live again, so don't miss your chance! Sign up now for \$149 or two payments of \$80 and you'll get to be part of 4 virtual meetups, recordings of each session, access to me via office hours, worksheets to help you process and plan, and lots of new friends! As always, there are several scholarship spots open because money should never be a barrier to becoming your best self. Find out more details at [BeckyLMcCoy.com/CourageousCommunity](https://BeckyLMcCoy.com/CourageousCommunity)

Last week we talked about integrity (pause and go listen if you haven't yet) and I felt like I left something out: being a person of integrity isn't just about what you do. It's also about what you don't do.

I've had a few conversations lately with people who feel like their friends only show up when they need something. They're dissatisfied with transactional relationships but that's all they've ever known so they feel stuck. It's a lonely place to live.

I definitely want to be available to my friends - to help when needed and be able to add value to their lives. But I also want to know that we connect because

we enjoy each others' company. That if neither of us could offer the other anything, our friendship would still exist.

Truthfully, I never really thought about this until the last 10 years. I've been really lucky to be in the same place at the same time as some really spectacular people I happened to get along with. Plenty of friendships come and go and a few really special ones have managed to make it through decades and distance and lots of difficult life circumstances.

But then when my dad died eight hours after my son was born when we were stationed at Nellis Air Force Base in Las Vegas and my family was all back East in Connecticut, I started to unravel. I had to adjust to more than just being a new mom. And then when my husband died a month before my daughter was born...phew. I truly came undone. I was in survival mode in every sense of the word. We wouldn't have made it without our friends.

There were certainly times when I felt like we were forgotten. Or when I didn't communicate clearly how great our needs were. Those were really painful times.

And there were times when people did not have the physical, emotional, or mental capacity to help us and they had to say no. And you know what? That didn't hurt - it was frustrating to have to keep asking for help when I was already running on empty - but I couldn't fault anyone for setting a boundary.

I used to say yes to most everything. Mostly because who wants to miss out on an opportunity to hang out with their friends, whether doing something fun or helping alleviate a burden? (Insert that GIF of Paul Rudd opening a beer and saying "Not me") But when I was widowed with two kids under three, I truly had nothing to offer anyone else.

It was really hard.

I worried how my relationships would be affected.

I fought my own feelings of inadequacy as my inner critic told me all sorts of things about how I was not the friend they deserved. That I could (and should) do better.

And then there was the COVID-19 pandemic. I mean, it still *is* the COVID-19 pandemic, but it's hard to know how to differentiate between the time when everything was shut down and people took it seriously and...whatever this is. We got sick November 2020 and, while the kids bounced back within a few days, I developed long COVID, something I'm still dealing with now. I couldn't even walk to get the mail or take the kids to the bus stop. I couldn't focus much and completely neglected all of my friends. I worried about the impact my absence would have on those relationships, but I physically could not do anything differently.

That level of complete vulnerability, where I couldn't offer my friends a single thing except a text every few months, showed me that my friends were there.

They were going through their own difficult things, but they still loved me and were emotionally present and invested even if they couldn't be more helpful.

And that love really changed me. I realized that our friendship didn't require giving. It just required the commitment to love each other. And the give and take of seasons of life come naturally.

All of these experiences where I needed help showed me that it's okay to say no. A true friend understands (even appreciates) boundaries. We don't have infinite supplies of mental, emotional, and physical energy. We only have so much to offer. And when we acknowledge that, by saying no when we need to, we honor our friendships by preserving the energy we \*can\* offer each other.

Here are to books to help you work on establishing boundaries in your friendships:

- [Set Boundaries, Find Peace](#) by Nedra Glover Tawwab
- [Peace Is a Practice](#) by Morgan Harper Nichols

You'll find links to these along with a full transcript of this episode at [BeckyLMcCoy.com/podcast/72](https://BeckyLMcCoy.com/podcast/72)

If you're curious about how you can apply this to your friendships (both in giving and receiving "no's"), come join me in the Courageous Community course. By the end of this four week course, you'll be confident in making new friends, be equipped to build deeper friendships, find clarity in when and how to practice vulnerability, and I bet you'll discover that you're already braver than you think! Head to [BeckyLMcCoy.com/CourageousCommunity](https://BeckyLMcCoy.com/CourageousCommunity) for more information and to register. Reminder: REGISTRATION CLOSES TODAY. I REPEAT: REGISTRATION CLOSES TODAY. (Today's Thursday, September 29<sup>th</sup> if you're listening the day it releases. If you're listening any time after, you'll have to consult a calendar, because I do not have those kinds of powers.)

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If you found this episode encouraging or helpful, share it with a friend and remember: friendships can handle "no's" and you're doing your friendships a great service by being honest about what you can offer. You're doing great.