

With the Grain

Acting human, naturally

COMMENTARY

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Here is a question for you who dread getting up for work everyday: You kinda miss it now, don't you?

Regardless of what you do for a living, the course of your time away from home likely brings you into contact with other people. Maybe you enjoy all the people in your work life; maybe they irritate the netherworld out of you. Isn't it odd, though, regardless how we feel about them, we find ourselves missing their company?

Equally odd is how our feelings about our families are evolving. We find ourselves wanting to add some distance — a great deal of distance, sometimes — from the very people we once thought we could never keep close enough.

I have a friend who thinks social distancing is actually a form of spousal abuse. He cites all the projects his wife wants him to complete while they are home together.

Social distancing can be maddening ... and there's a reason for it.

Humans are inherently social. It is in our nature.

We are hard-wired in our DNA to seek out other people. At its very heart, this inborn circuitry is why we flirt, attract, seek out relationships, and mate in the course of our human experience.

Think about it. Forming a human society is how we protect ourselves as a species. We do not have claws, long teeth, or poisonous venom with which to defend ourselves from predators. We can't run fast, we can't fly away, and our climbing skills are just so-so. We can't get away fast enough!

Let's face it. If we didn't come together to protect each other, we all would be well down the food chain ... somewhere near meat loaf.

Being social is an involuntary response to being human — like breathing.

And that would be the end of the story if not for one catch: For some reason — whether as a means to sustain our society, or simply as a cunning way to keep things interesting — Our Maker has implanted in our genetic code a counterbalance to social desire.

Equally powerful, equally essential, equally elemental — we humans are born with the innate need for independence. We require freedom.

That's why being with our families under social distancing can seem like too much of a good thing. We are driven by nature to do things our own way — for ourselves, not for others. Try getting a two-year-old to eat his spinach. Tell your teenager she has to go to Aunt Ruth's instead of the concert. Teenagers and two-year-olds are experts at human independence.

This constant battle between the need to belong and the need to be free makes social distancing foreign to us. Be as that may, just hang in there, folks.

Social distancing will end, because human nature opposes it.

When it does, it's okay to celebrate. Say hello to the people you miss. Be happy sending your family out to do the same.

It's only natural to enjoy feeling human again.

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