Exercise 01

Many of us tend to feel uncomfortable making requests of anyone beyond our “inner circle” of family and close friends.

But in doing so we vastly underestimate the responsiveness of “weak ties” ― our acquaintances and people we don’t know very well.

Weak ties are extremely valuable because they are the bridges between social circles.

Novel information, new solutions to problems, and other resources travel across these bridges.

We also vastly underestimate the responsiveness of “dormant ties” ― the connections we once had that we haven’t maintained.

For example, most people wouldn’t even consider reaching out to a high school classmate they haven’t seen in twenty-five years to ask for a job lead; we assume such attempts to reconnect would be rejected, or that our former classmate would resent our reaching out only to ask for a favor.

But most people in your past would actually welcome hearing from ― and helping ― you, according to organizational researchers.

The passage of time doesn’t erase a shared history of understanding, emotions, and trust.

Exercise 02

Many times our greatest growth periods come through the experience of pain.

Those of us who have experienced a dark time in life through serious illness or emotional trauma know the opportunity it brings for enormous wisdom and insight.

Sometimes we have to experience the contrast of darkness in order to find the light.

Indeed, there are lessons within our lives that may be much more apparent in the darkness of our despair because we focus more intensely when there are fewer things to see.

It is like walking into a dark room ― at first we can see nothing, yet after our eyes have had a chance to refocus, we begin to see particular items in the room even though the room is still dark.

Likewise, we can have some very profound insights about areas of our life that need improvement while we are quietly lying in bed recovering from an illness, away from our hectic daily routines.

Exercise 03

Privacy has not always characterized American families.

Before the 19th century, people felt free to enter other’s homes and tell them what to wear and how to treat their children.

The development of the value of family privacy and autonomy emerged with the separation of home and work and the growth of cities during the late 19th century.

Innovations in the amenities available within the home over the years ― indoor plumbing, refrigerators, telephones, radios, televisions, central air conditioning, home computers, tablets, and smart speakers, for example ― have all increased the privacy and isolation of American households.

Our need to leave home for entertainment, goods, or services has been considerably reduced.

Air conditioners, for instance, allow us to spend hot, stuffy summer evenings inside our own homes instead of on the front porch or at the local ice cream shop.

With the Internet, text messaging, social media, and home shopping cable networks, family members can survive without ever leaving the privacy of their home.

The institution of family has become increasingly self-contained and private.

Exercise 04

Social media ― and the possibility of connecting people across the globe through communication and information platforms ― may seem like a tool for tolerance because technology enables people to see and participate in worlds beyond their own.

We often identify teens, in particular, as the great beneficiaries of this new cosmopolitanism.

However, when we look at how social media is adopted by teens, it becomes clear that the Internet doesn’t level inequality in any practical or widespread way.

The patterns are all too familiar: prejudice, racism, and intolerance are pervasive.

Many of the social divisions that exist in the offline world have been replicated, and in some cases amplified, online.

Those old divisions shape how teens experience social media and the information that they encounter.

This is because while technology does allow people to connect in new ways, it also reinforces existing connections.

It does enable new types of access to information, but people’s experiences of that access are uneven at best.