

Connected In Christ

Number seven in a nine-part series on what we believe
November 1, 2009

Drama, Intro:

I don't know how I ended up in a role that involves so much public speaking. In school, I was into math and art. Those skills don't do me much good now. *Although later in the service I'll draw you a picture and include a graph!*

I have learned a few things about being up front. It's important to view people, not as a crowd, but as individuals with needs and hopes and fears. This whole experience can be very relational.

When I look out at you, I see *friends* and *potential friends*. That's the church! This week I read some definitions of friendship. Some are funny. Others are a little syrupy.

"A friend is someone who knows the song in your heart and can sing it back to you when you have forgotten the words."

"True friends stab you in the front." Correct you to your face!

"Friends are those rare people who ask how we are and then wait to hear the answer."

"Friends are God's way of apologizing to us for our families."

"A friend is someone who reaches for your hand, but touches your heart."

"A friend helps you keep your commitments!" This last one speaks of accountability. Sometimes we avoid it, but we need it. Friends know what you really care about and they help you *keep your aim true*. When we enlist the help of others, we find it easier to accomplish what we set out to do. Whether it's an exercise program, a budget, or a new habit, we need people to help us keep on the right track.

The value of friendship is seen in the ministry of Christ. Jesus and his disciples lived in community. They hung out. He was their small group leader—they studied the Scriptures and discussed the application. *It was like an*

ongoing retreat! They took *road trips* to celebrate festivals together. They shared their finances and their meals. They sang together, ministered together, and fished together. At the end, Jesus wanted them to be with him. He valued their presence. *They were friends!*

The union among Christ's followers continued to grow after the resurrection and it blossomed into the Christian church. We, as his modern followers, are also to experience community in real relationships.

We've been talking about what we believe and why. Our foundational belief *about the church* is this: ***The church is the community of Christians, the context in which we live out our connection. But how are we connected?***

1. We are connected in Christ. That's the first way in which we are connected. ***It is a mystical connection.***

Even if you don't see it, our connection is real. We *are one* because *we are all part* of the body of Christ. We're linked under his headship. ***Col. 1:18 he is the head of the body, the church.... Eph. 4:15,16 the Head is Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.*** This union needs to be lived out. What good is it to *hear that we are one in Christ* and yet *live in isolation*? We're to make our *invisible* connection *visible*. In ***John 17:20-23*** Jesus is praying for future followers: ***May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.***

When our mystical connection is made tangible in unity, this demonstrates the truth of ***John 3:16*** - that ***the Father so loved the world that he sent his Son.*** Our mystical connection is the root, but it must bear fruit. *We need to experience more than a mystical connection.*

2. We are connected functionally. We are actually made as interlocking pieces of a puzzle to fit together.

It is a practical connection. We've just read that the church is the body of Christ. We are all various body parts with different functions. Don't say: *I know what organ I am - the appendix!* **1 Cor. 12:27** Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. One is a wrist, another the hand. **Rom 12:4,5** - Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.

The ways in which you differ from others is *not a mistake*; our *diversity* in skills is *by design*. God gives each believer unique features then joins us together. *Dissimilar parts are interconnected to operate with mutual interdependence.*

Winning teams are composed of members with different abilities all working harmoniously toward a common goal. The thin quarterback needs the big lineman. The aggressive linebacker needs the fast safety. Why feign self-sufficiency? We need each other. **Eccl. 4:9,10** Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work: If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up! It is practical to be connected to others. You do your part - offer what you can and the other guy will do his part. That's how the church functions.

3. We are connected relationally. It is a family connection.

The Bible calls us sisters and brothers. **Gal 6:10** -refers to the church as those who *belong to the family of believers*. **Eph 2:19** - calls us *members of God's household*. We are family and should act like it. **1 Tim 5:1,2** Do not rebuke an older man harshly, but exhort him as if he were your father. Treat younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters, with absolute purity. As in physical families, love is needed in the spiritual family. **Rom. 15:7** - Accept one another, then,

just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God. Sometimes acceptance is hard to show because people have rough edges. *I'm not talking about you; it's the other people!* We rub each other wrong. So there are times when we need to forgive each other. **Eph 4:32** - Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. This is what works in family connections.

Like a family, the church is to be a warm context for meaningful relationships. We don't want anyone left out. At the conclusion of this message, I'll diagram the value of simply reaching out in love. We don't want anyone missing at the family reunion.

4. We are connected in purpose. It is a strategic connection.

The *body* of Christ isn't just to *sit* around. We're to get up and go. We're to fulfill Christ's commission: **Mat 28:19** - ...go and make disciples of all nations.... **John 20:21** - as the Father has sent me...

We must not be content to play church and remain in our holy huddle. If we want to make progress, we must *break* from the huddle and move the ball down the field.

Describing the church, Jesus used metaphors like *salt and light* that denote penetration. We're to have an influence in the world and to do this we must *enter* it. That's what Jesus did and it cost him his life. **John 1:14** - The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We are to be *in* but not *of* the world (**John 17:15,16**). This means we don't conform, but remain distinct. We aren't to succumb to the subtle seduction of society's values and mimic consumer culture, always asking what church has to offer us. Church isn't for us. Church *is* us! We are the church and we are united to accomplish God's will on the earth. Our connection with one another is strategic. We have the highest possible purpose to accomplish together.

5. We are connected eternally. *It is a permanent connection.* These relationships are not just for now, they are forever. **1 Thess 4:16-17** describe the return of Christ. It says that both those who have already died and those who are still living will be gathered together. And so we will be with the Lord forever. In **Rev 21:3,4** we get to peak into the future and we see relationships: Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.

The prophetic Scriptures depict us enjoying the presence of God *together forever!* It would be nice to get along well down here so we can be *ready for an eternity together.* I don't want anyone to miss out on what God has in store for us.

Let me draw a diagram about our connection.

White board explanation.

What I was thinking of saying while drawing on the whiteboard:

It can be rude to categorize people, but for the sake of ministry, there are times when it is helpful to put people in piles, so to speak. For instance, we can divide the world into people who like hot spicy food and the criminally insane.

Divisions of the diagram:

- Let's divide the world into people who are connected in our church and those who aren't.

- Those who are connected can be further classified into those who are plugged in and those who aren't.

- And those who aren't can be divided into those who used to attend and may do so again, those who used to attend and are very unlikely to return (either due to a permanent physical

relocation or plugging into another church), and those who have never attended (the largest group).

Points of the diagram:

- Real outreach, the kind we should be passionate about pursuing, is reaching those who have never been here and never heard the gospel.

- Expending energy in reaching again and again for those who have intentionally left and who have plugged into another church is likely to be unfruitful. There is no sense in stealing sheep.

- Those who aren't really connected may be fairly similar to those who have faded away. Less and less frequent attendance can evolve into not coming at all. These we will label as "at risk."

- Those who have slipped away and those who are at risk are missing out and need help. Expending energy in those who have just slipped away can be very fruitful.

- Those who are connected can encourage those who are at risk. Our ring should face out. If one wanders away, go find him.

- One way we can be of help is to simply display true friendship and express concern through personal contacts.

- Different methods of making contact seem to be increasingly meaningful in direct proportion to the difficulty of making them.

- The Jethro principle (from Ex. 18) demonstrates the power of multiplication.

What to do now?

Let's get specific. Here's your assignment:

Reaching: Think of people who are not experiencing what the church is all about - connection in Christ? *Write down a few names, pray and follow through.*

List names of old friends:

Connecting: *Meet* someone new and *learn* his or her name today. Look for them next week.

List names of new friends:

Growing: *Sign up* for a group. (*Jim and Kelly Doyle are starting a new Growth Group in Silverton. Tuesdays at 6:30.*) **List the name of a new group:** *White card: GROW!*

Concl: I want to conclude with a **GO fund update.** The elders have asked me to explain what we're doing with this campaign and why you would want to be part of it. It's a plan to Go beyond fixed costs and support ministry here. (*Ushers pass packets out. Also available in the lobby.*)

One of the ministries Annie and I support beyond our giving to Dayspring is World Vision. We sponsor 4 children. I've noticed a technique they use in their promotional material. They show you a child's face. You're looking into Emilio's eyes. You've probably seen these ads on line or in magazines. I don't think of this method as manipulative. I think it is motivational. They are just trying to show you what your resources are going to support. It may not be this child, but it will be another like him.

So, what will *your sacrificial support* of our GO campaign accomplish? *One of the things* we want to fund is a Middle School director to work under Tim. In order to motivate you to participate, I'll bring up a young person so you can see his face. He's not a hungry homeless orphan, he lives, us but he is always hungry. Mason is a Jr. at McNary, and very involved there and in our High School group here, but he also serves in the Middle School ministry. I want him to tell you what has been going on there.

Mason shares what he sees God doing.

Jesus was talking to his followers and directed their attention to the fields, saying they are ripe for harvest (Jn 4). The Go Fund Campaign is a team effort to raise the resources necessary to reap this great spiritual harvest. It is like fueling the combine. We spend a lot of time and effort tilling and planting. But this is what it is all about: the harvest! *Peppers yesterday.*

A key work is *team*. Everyone can participate...not with equal gifts, but with commitment to reach out for all God has in store for us.

So far, we have seen over \$70 K pledged. This is nearly half of our \$150,000 goal! Thank you for responding to the Go Fund Campaign!

Here's how you can participate:

- 1) Take a pledge card home.
- 2) Discuss and pray about how God is leading you to respond.
- 3) Write down what you plan to pledge over and above any amount you normally give.
- 4) Also indicate on your pledge card the timeline. 1x—12x.
- 5) Return the pledge card to the church office or next weekend in the service. Envelopes are provided in lobby.

We know everyone can't give but you can still participate in prayer. Fill out a card and let us know you are praying and let us know your prayer request.

We know that there are still people still responding so we've modified our time line:

Next Weekend will be the final service you can respond before we crunch numbers to lay out the budget. We know responses will keep coming in, but we have to affirm the budget in the services the next weekend: Nov. 14,15.

Pick up packets with a pledge card, information sheet, prayer card and return envelope.

Offering prayer: Mason prays

More Meat (unused random ideas)

Pr 27:17 - As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another...

What is a church?

oA building? Many churches use buildings, but the biblical use of the word refers to people, not to a place.

oA gathering of hypocrites? Maybe so. Our behavior doesn't yet line up with our beliefs, but we are not content to remain in hypocrisy.

The union among his followers only continued to grow after the res: Acts 2:42-47 They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. 43 Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. 44 All the believers were together and had everything in common. 45 Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. 46 Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, 47 praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

Each different size gathering has its own group dynamics. Here in the worship service you can receive exhortation and experience unity. Events and retreats have a similar function. But it's important to utilize other contexts as well.

Mid-sized groups like classes provide a great environment to build a sense of identity and enjoy fellowship: Life stage/age specific groups: Children's ministries, Youth, MOD, women's, men's, Rooted.

Small groups provide an atmosphere conducive to cultivating intimacy and fostering accountability.

Support: Substance abuse, divorce recovery.

Home fellowship Bible studies.

People also connect in the context of service in task-based groups: Ushers, youth staff, welcome center, greeters, elders, celebration, helping hands. Connection is key!

Heb 10:25 - Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing.

People say, I don't want to join a home fellowship. I was in one once and had a bad experience. It isn't worth it; I found it inconvenient, uncomfortable. Too important to not try again.

Jesus made disciples. He set out to reach the world by investing himself in the lives of his followers. No surprise that he commissioned his followers to do the same. Disciples make disciples.

But I'm not outgoing. Think: would God command us all to do something that only highly extroverted people can do?

How do Christ's disciples reproduce? With variety. Peter's style was direct, his habit was to dive right in. Paul used an intellectual approach. His messages were structured and deep. Blind man in John 9 is an example of the testimony approach. He refused to enter into a debate, one thing I know, I was blind and now I see. Matt used an event, he threw a party. The Samaritan woman used an invitational approach.

Mark Mittleberg: "I'm convinced that one of the greatest barriers to Christians participating in personal evangelism is their misunderstanding of what it entails. So many of us are fearful... and view it as an unnatural activity. Well, here's good news that's both freeing and empowering: God knew what He was doing when he made you. He custom-designed you with your unique combination of personality, temperament, talents, and background, and he wants to

use you to reach others in a fashion that fits your design.”
The supernatural can be natural!

It is a process with sequential steps. Jesus started with:
Come... and you will see (John 1:39).

Matt 28:29 - As you go... It's assumed. Following Christ involves going places that may be a little scary. Missionaries who cross the sea may deal with dangers like poisonous snakes. The sacrifices we make are often more subtle. Will you cross the street of the lunch room? What do you have to lose? Probably not your life. Maybe a little status. Take a risk!

Each new believer comes onto a team. We don't just gather spectators, we're increasing the work force, an army. 2 Tim 2:4 - each of us is to "...please the one who enlisted him as a soldier." Partners: we're in this together.

Consider the connection between the great commission and the great commandment (Matt 22:36-40). Love is the motive and the method. Without it we are nothing.

Results from a Gallup poll: friendships play a major role in church health and church growth. Friendships with other church members is a key reason why many individuals joined and attend a specific church. The survey shows that churches must create an environment where friendships can flourish.

Note *the purpose* behind God forming every believer with unique features:

1 Cor. 12:7 for the common good; 14:12 for the edification of the church. Eph 4:12 so that the body of Christ may be built up.

The church is an environment where people can actually connect with others.

Friendships are forged here.

From the website:

The Church:

The corollary of union with Jesus Christ is that all believers become members of His body, the church. There is one true church universal, comprised of all those who acknowledge Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. The Scripture commands believers to gather together to devote themselves to worship, prayer, teaching of the Word, observance of baptism and communion as the Biblical ordinances established by Jesus Christ, fellowship, service to the body through the development and use of talents and gifts, and outreach to the world. Wherever God's people meet regularly in obedience to this command, there is the local expression of the church. Under the watch care of supportive leadership, its members are to work together in love and unity, intent on the one ultimate purpose of glorifying Christ, while awaiting His return to be with the Lord forever.