

Small Group Sermon Series

Message 3 - Connecting Through Small Groups

We've talking for several weeks now about the importance of Connecting. What would actually happen if those of us who are designed to connect actually connected? We are designed to connect. God said that it is not good for us to be disconnected. He said that it is not good for man to be alone.

The church was instituted by Christ to facilitate authentic connecting. The church is supposed to be a place where we connect with God and others. Jesus demonstrated community in his relationship with 12 disciples. This community literally changed the world. We are here today because twelve men made a deep connection with Christ and a profound connection with each other.

We know that it is God's will for us to connect. We have proven this by the word of God. If it is God's will for us to connect then we also understand that Satan's objective is to keep us disconnected. Satan wants us isolated. [The banana that gets separated from the bunch gets peeled and eaten.](#) Even our flesh has a hard time connecting.

Last week we talked about how Jesus modeled "connecting" for us during his ministry. He chose twelve men to connect with, and through his ministry they learned how to live in community.

Today I want to get real practical with you. I think that a lot of times we preachers are guilty of preaching things that are good, but we don't give the people ways to apply what they have just heard. I don't want to talk about theory or theology, but I want to give you the nuts and bolts today. Today I want to get real practical. This message is all about connecting in small groups and the importance of small groups.

1. Connecting can only happen with a small group of people.

None of us can successfully connect with hundreds or thousands of people. It is impossible. We are not capable of making this happen. We can have hundreds of acquaintances or thousands of acquaintances, but we cannot connect with that number of people. Even if you have a thousand face book friends there is no way that you can really connect with all of those people. We may know the names of scores of people, but it is impossible to connect with that many people. We can only truly know and be known by a few. We can connect with a small group of people.

The problem is that we usually fail to do this. Most of us would probably rather just have a bunch of people that we know casually. Most of us would rather have acquaintances instead of

people that we connect with. God has called us to go deeper than that. He has called us to connect. God will not allow you to just have acquaintances. God calls us to connect.

Every person needs an oikos. What is an oikos? It is actually the Greek word translated as household. Sometimes it was translated as a house. Sometimes it was used to speak about a family. In the book of Acts and in the Epistles it is used several times as a circle of people that you care for. It is a group of people who know you personally. It is a group of family and friends that you are connected with.

Do you remember the jailor asked Paul what must I do to be saved? He told him to repent and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you and your household will be saved. What he was saying is that if you let Jesus come into your life not only will you be changed, but also your circle of family and friends. Everybody needs a spiritual oikos. Everyone needs a group of people that connect with you.

Acts 11: 14 (Message) Send to Joppa and get Simon, the one they call Peter. He'll tell you something that will save your life—in fact, you and everyone you care for. (In other words, everyone you are connected to.)

Everyone you care for is translated as an oikos. This has to be a small circle. We can only connect with a small group of people. The problem is that most of us don't do this.

2. Small Groups can make a big difference.

Jesus believed in small groups. Jesus had twelve disciples whom he hung out with and lived life with, but he also had a smaller group than the twelve. He had three (Peter, James, and John) that he was even more intimate with. It was almost like they were a unique small group for Jesus. When he was in the Garden of Gethsemane preparing to take on the sin of the world he took Peter, James and John with him. He had twelve, but he also had an inner circle of three. This was an oikos within an oikos. Why? Jesus knew that small groups can make a big difference.

1. Small groups within a church undercut the holy man and holy place myth. The idea that we have a church today is that we have a holy man called a pastor in a holy place. We go to a holy building with a holy man.

Matthew 18: 20 Jesus said, for where two or three come together in my name, there I am with them.

Jesus was not talking about a holy man and a holy place. He was talking about the fact that when two people come together in the name of Jesus that he is in the midst of them. Church is not somewhere you go, but it is who we are. We are the church and when we meet in His name

church can happen. Small groups are important because it teaches us this principle. Church can happen in a den. Church can happen in a park. Church can happen at Starbucks. Church can happen in a car when people begin to lift up the name of Christ. Church happens when anybody gets together in the name of Jesus.

One of the problems that we have is that we have made Christianity a set of beliefs instead of a way of life. It is not about a set of beliefs, but rather it is about how we live. Christianity is a way of life. We are the church. We think that church is to come to a building to hear music and a sermon. Church happens when people meet in the name of Jesus.

2. They empower people to serve.

This is a beautiful thing. One of the things that bother me is that most churches are set up in such a way that most gifts cannot be used. There are people here that can speak, counsel, sing, and other things that we may know nothing about.

How many of you understand that we all have gifts and talents? God wants us to use those gifts to advance his kingdom. The beauty of small groups is that a lot of people can be used by God. Small groups give people an opportunity to serve when normally they would never get the opportunity.

1 Peter 4: 10 (NIV) Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms.

What happens in a small group? People that would never get an opportunity to use their gifts and talents in a corporate setting are enabled to allow the grace of God to flow through their lives to minister to others.

3. They create a network of care and accountability.

Small groups allow accountability to happen naturally. How many understand that accountability is important? We all need people to nudge us and encourage us. Sometimes we need someone to remind us of what we said we were going to do. It does not mean that people are going to be on you like a watch dog.

Accountability happens naturally within a small group because that group becomes people that you care for. Many of us would avoid stupid decisions if we had someone to hold us accountable. How many dumb decisions have you made because you didn't have anyone close enough to tell you that what you are about to do is going to be a big mistake? The bible says that there is safety in the multitude of counselors. Within these small groups you are going to connect with people that have already been through what you are going through.

Have you ever heard this statement, “A friend is someone that accepts you the way that you are?” This is only partly true. A true friend speaks truth into your life. A true friend is someone that will remind you of what you said that you were going to do. Not because they are a watch dog, but because they are your friend.

There is a face to face accountability. There is this whole idea of care. We all have one thing in common. We are either in a crisis, coming out of a crisis, or we are getting ready to go into a crisis. Some of you are in a crisis, some of you are coming out of a crisis, and others are getting ready to go into a crisis.

Difficulty happens. Problems happen. The beauty of a small group is that there is someone who will be there for you. They know what you are going through. When you are in the middle of a crisis it is too late to connect. You have to be connected before you go into a crisis and you can only connect with a small group.

54 times in the New Testament we are told things that we should do for one another. Love one another. Pray for one another. Bear each other's burdens. Confess your faults to one another. Forgive one another. Be kind to one another. Greet one another. Comfort one another. Encourage one another. You cannot do that in the corporate setting. This is why you have to be connected with a small group.

The bible says that we are supposed to provoke one another to do good works. This is accountability. Provoke one another to good works.

Hebrews 10: 24-25 (NLT)

24 Think of ways to encourage one another to outburst of love and good deeds. 25 And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage and warn each other, especially now that the day of his coming back again is drawing near.

Think of ways to encourage one another. When is the last time you thought of ways to encourage someone else? When is the last time you thought of ways to be a blessing? Then it says let us not neglect our meeting together. You cannot connect without physically seeing the people that you are connected with. He said, “Don't quit meeting together as some are doing.” Why are they not meeting? They say they are too busy. I have kids. I got hurt the last time.

He said to encourage and warn each other. This is care and accountability. We need to do this especially now that we see the day of the Lord approaching. Now more than ever you need to be connecting. You need to be in some type of relationship where there is care and accountability now more than ever before.

4. They provide an environment of growth.

This may come as a shock to some of you. It does not matter how much you read your bible. It does not matter how much you pray. It does not matter how devoted you are too God. You will never develop spiritual maturity until you connect with others. Christianity does not work by your-self. You must have others. I told you last week that discipleship is all about relationship.

Jesus said, "go into all the world and make disciples baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost." What does this mean? Win people to Christ. Baptize them. Lead them to make a public confession. In New Testament Baptism was an identity. Baptism was assimilation. I used to be a child of the dark, but now I am a child of the light. Baptism said that I am with these people. I am now part of the group. Bring them to faith and connect them with the body of Christ. They cannot be a free flowing individual. Connection is a must.

Ephesians 4: 15 (NIV) Speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is Christ.

When people who care about you (love you, connected to you) speak truth into your life then you are able to grow up into maturity. There is no spiritual growth being a loner. You need a connection.

5. They give you the chance to be annoyed once in awhile.

A lot of people don't want to get into small groups because they don't want to be annoyed by someone they don't like. Many of you thought of a name. Your name was thought of too.

We have heard it said, "Choose your friends wisely." This is a well meaning statement. This is not true. This may come as a surprise, but most of us do not choose our friends, but friends happen. Friends happen. Think about some of your friends. If you were choosing friends would you have chosen them? We all have friends that we don't like. Life put us together. You would help them and be there for them, but you really don't like them all that well. There is something about being in a relationship when someone is annoying you to death. This is learning the practice of love. There is something about staying in a relationship with someone who is annoying you.

I don't want to be in a group with people that I don't like. You will be in heaven with people that you don't like. Get over it. We all have a bad day. We all have a bad week. God puts us in the middle of this. Being connected has positive things, but it also gives you a chance to be annoyed.

Jesus said anybody can love the loveable. Anybody can be patient with people you like. Can you hang in there even if they are annoying you? This is maturity. This is friendship. This is connecting.

1 Peter 4: 8-9 (CEV) Most important of all, you must sincerely love each other, because love wipes away many sins. Welcome people into your home and don't grumble about it.

The King James Version says that love covers a multitude of sin. What does this mean? This means that love overlooks a lot of stuff. Love bears all things, believes all things, and hopes all things.

Have you ever had someone tried to talk bad about another person that you love? Most of us have experienced this. What happens? We begin to defend that person. Even if we know what they are saying is true. Why? Love!

He finished the verse by saying welcome people into your home and don't grumble about it. Do you know that the word home in this scripture is oikos. It simply means to let people into your circle. Don't grumble about it.

Small groups give you the chance to grow in ways that you have been trying to grow for years, but you haven't been successful. They give you a chance to see that church happens when people get together in the name of Jesus. You will be able to connect deeper. You will be able to use your gifts. You will be cared for and held accountable. They will teach you how to love at a level that you couldn't do all by yourself.

BE PROACTIVE—GET INTO A GROUP

I don't want you to raise your hands, but I would say that most of you do not have an oikos. Most of you do not have people that you meet with on a consistent basis to connect. They are like a spiritual household for you. Most of us would have to say no.

Most of us have some work to do. Proactive simply means to take some initiative and do something. We can talk about our lack of connecting or we can do something about it. I can't make anything happen. Only God can make things happen, but we have been working hard on creating an environment where connecting is easy. We have done everything possible to make this successful. There has been time, energy, training, and resources poured into this. This is something that God will have to bring together.