

Small Group Sermon Series

Message 4: Enemies of Connecting

This is our last message in this series on Connecting. So far in this series, we have come to understand that God designed us to connect—that we were not created out of the loneliness of God, but out of the fellowship of God. God has never been alone. It has always been God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. God created us so that He could share all things with us.

We have seen that the church is not about just gathering a crowd, but building a community—that the church is one of the few places left in society where the hope of true community exists. I believe that God wants this house filled every time we come through the doors, but I also believe that God desires us to have authentic relationships. We have observed how Jesus not only proclaimed community, but he also constructed community as the core witness of the Gospel message.

Last week we talked about the importance of small groups. We learned that small groups can make a big difference. They empower people to serve. They create a network of care and accountability. They provide an atmosphere for spiritual growth. They even give you a chance to be annoyed.

Here's the bottom line.....CONNECTING IN AUTHENTIC COMMUNITY IS THE WILL OF GOD FOR YOU.

If you are not connecting, you are not fulfilling God's perfect plan for your life. Connecting in the truest biblical sense of the word is not easy for many of us. Why? It's because something is getting in the way of connecting. What is it? There are enemies to connecting. There are three forces that oppose genuine connecting.

1. **The Devil!** God said that it is not good for man to be alone. Anything that God says is not good the devil will say that it is good. God says that it is not good for us to be disconnected, isolated, alone, and alienated. The devil says that these things are good. We have to understand that we battle against demons, principalities, powers and evil forces. There is a real devil and real demons that try to keep us from fulfilling the plan of God.

The enemy knows that unity commands the blessing of God. He understands that. This is why he fights so hard to keep churches and the people of God from really connecting. The one prayer that Jesus prayed before he was crucified was that God would make us one just like he and the father are one. It is God's will for us to connect.

1 Peter 5: 8-9 (NLT) watch out for attacks from the devil, your great enemy. He prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for some victim to devour. Take a firm stand against him, and be strong in your faith.

Peter wrote this verse and he knew exactly what he was talking about. Peter knew about this subject because he had fallen prey to the devil on numerous occasions. On one occasion he was speaking to Jesus and Jesus responded by telling Peter, "Get behind me Satan". In other words, Peter, the words that you are speaking are the words of Satan.

We have all fallen prey to Satan. We have all been swayed by the enemy before. Satan opposes God and seeks to destroy every work of God. His tactics are lies and deception. The devil hates unity. He hates connecting. He wants to stop this from happening. We are in a real battle against the devil.

John 8: 44 (NLT) for you are the children of your father the Devil, and you love to do the evil things he does. He was a murderer from the beginning and has always hated the truth. There is no truth in him. When he lies, it is consistent with his character; for he is a liar and the father of lies.

Revelation 12: 9 (NLT) This great dragon—the ancient serpent called the Devil, or Satan, the one deceiving the whole world—was thrown down to the earth with all his angels.

2. The Sinful Nature in Our Hearts!

We all inherited a sinful nature. It is a part of our spiritual DNA. We were all born into sin. There is something in all of us that makes temptation look good. There is something in all of us that makes it easy to disobey God. There is a tendency to say no to God and yes to wrong.

Galatians 5: 17 (NLT) The old sinful nature loves to do evil, which is just opposite from what the Holy Spirit wants....These two forces are constantly fighting each other, and your choices are never free from this conflict.

What does this mean in relation to Connecting? We understand that we have to connect. We cannot serve God alone. We must love God and love others. We must connect to God and connect to others. We know that it is God's will for us to have authentic relationships. This means that when we make a decision to connect with other people that Satan will come or our flesh will rise up and say no. We cannot make a decision to connect without there being conflict. There is a constant battle going on. None of our choices to please God go without conflict.

When Adam and Eve sinned against God something entered the human race.

The bible says that after they sinned against God that they knew that they were naked. Why didn't they realize that they were naked before sin? I would know it if I were standing up here naked. Why did they not know it before sin? Because when sin entered the picture they became self conscious. They became self aware. Before sin their primary concern was fellowship with God and taking care of the Garden of Eden. After sin, their primary concern became themselves.

After sin entered the picture they started measuring themselves. They started hiding from each other and hiding from God. They sewed fig leaves together so that God would not see their condition. Self consciousness makes you so aware of self that you cannot see the need to connect with others. This is the core of what sin is. It is about me.

Sin entering the picture caused Adam and Eve to become their own greatest concern. They even went to extremes to protect themselves. God asked Adam, "What have you guys done?"

Adam blamed everything on the woman to protect himself. Eve blamed everything on the serpent to protect herself. This was the beginning of Me-ism.

How many times has God told you to do something, but you failed to do it because you wanted to protect yourself from rejection and hurt? You were so aware of yourself that you and what people would think about you that you failed to do what you know God told you to do.

When Jesus came into the earth He came to free us from the never ending struggle of trying to cover ourselves. Now we can live open and honest and even risk being hurt and misunderstood and wounded. Jesus said if you seek to save your own life you will lose it, but if you lose your life for my sake you will find it. Jesus came to save us from living a self protected life.

This sinful nature makes it difficult for us to connect. We want it, but we are afraid to. We want closeness, but we are afraid of closeness. We want to connect, but we are afraid to connect. There is not one decision that you make that is free from that conflict.

3. The Culture Around Us!

The bible calls the culture around us the world.

1 John 2: 15-16 (The Message)

Don't love the world's ways....Love of the world squeezes out love for the father. Practically everything that goes on the world—wanting your own way, wanting everything for yourself, wanting to appear important—has nothing to do with the Father. It just isolates you from him.

We should not be surprised that the culture around us makes connecting difficult. The bible says that Satan is the god of this world. The world is kind of set up to make connecting difficult. We have a culture all around us that makes connecting difficult.

The world is set up in such a way to isolate us. We drive in our cars to work alone. We stop and get gas and we don't even have to communicate with people. We simply put our card into the gas pump and pump our own gas. We sit in cubicles. We sit in front of computer screens. Everything is set up to disconnect us from relationships.

What is culture? Culture is a learned system of knowledge, behavior, attitudes, beliefs, and values that is shared by a group of people.

The culture is changing more and more to isolate us. We can say that this is just a coincidence or we can wake up and realize that Satan wants us isolated. This is the result of the darkness of men's hearts. He wants us to feel alone. We are hiding from each other.

Our enemies include the devil, our sinful nature and the culture around us.

God has called us to connect. What is the effect of these three forces in our lives?

1. **Individualism.** I am the only one that matters. We live in a culture where the self made man becomes heroes. We exalt individualism. Herbert Hoover said that America is built on rugged individualism. We celebrate independence in America. We even have a holiday called Independence Day. It is not about the group, but me. Me-ism is nurtured

in America. It is sold to us in commercials. You deserve a break. Get all that you can get. I know that this item is expensive, but I'm worth it. This is considered the right of every person. I will sue you for my rights. You don't have rights. It feeds over into everything else. Relationships like marriages and friendships are destroyed because people say that I am not fulfilled any more.

2. **Isolation.** Individualism doesn't deliver on what it promises. We become more isolated. We become lonely. We are filled with anxiety. Americans are the loneliest people in the world. People have fewer friends now than ever before. Most people can only name 2 friends that they really trust. One of those is a member of their family. Our culture is filled with loneliness and anxiety. No one has time for anything or anybody. Isolation is a curse. When you have many acquaintances and few friends it is a curse. We need true friends. What is a true friend? Someone who is willing to speak truth into your life.
3. **Competitiveness.** What is success? Did you know that in many places in the world success is having dinner with friends? In America success is determined by acquiring more things. Success is determined by beating the competition. Looking good and working longer. Pushing harder.

We become stressed out and burned out. This is true. Does this please God? You know the answer. We become competitive. This is why people work hours that keep them out of God's presence. We run so much that we even stress out our kids trying to make sure that they are in everything. We think that we cannot change. This is the way that it is. If you buy into this you have already lost.

I am reminded of a young man who came from Sudan (a place terrorized with civil war) to the United States. He came to America and said I am going back to Africa because Americans are too busy. He said, "I cannot make friends here". Here in America you say time is money. We do not say that in Africa.

Our lifestyles keep us from connecting to God and others. Because of these three forces (the devil, the sinful nature, and the culture) we are consumed with individualism, isolation, and competitiveness and we have failed to connect on a level that is pleasing to God.

How do we Break Through the barriers to connecting?

1. **Commit to Engage in the Struggle**

We can pretend that everything is okay the way it is and never connect or we can be what Jesus called us to be. He has called us to be salt and light to the world and there is no way to be salt and light to people that we have failed to connect to. We have to realize that this is a struggle and we must commit to engage in the struggle. If the church fails in this area people will never connect. The church is the last hope for true authentic relationships to take place. We can take on the devil, flesh and the world.

1 Peter 5: 8-9 (NLV) The devil is working against you...Stand against him and be strong in your faith.

You can decide that you are not going to be deceived. You have that choice. You don't have to live your life subject to the devil. You can take on the devil and the sinful nature.

Romans 8: 13 (NLT) if you keep on following the sinful nature, you will perish. But if through the power of the Holy Spirit you turn from it and its evil deeds, you will live.

We have the Holy Spirit and the sinful nature does not always have to win. Greater is He that is in me than he that is in the world.

Romans 12: 2 (The Message) don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You'll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what he wants from you, and quickly respond to it.

You don't have to become well adjusted to the culture, but you can be changed on the inside. You can be a counter culture person. We are not called to be a sub-culture. We are called to transform the culture around us. We are called to be different. We have to decide that we are going to commit to the battle. We have to be intentional to live another way.

2. Commit the time to connect.

Time is the most valuable commodity that we have. It is going to take some time. This is the big problem. We don't have time. You have to decide to take that on. You are going to have to intentionally look at your time and schedule and make some changes. You have to decide what values are important to you and your family. You have to decide that! Don't tell me how busy you are. Tell me what you have accomplished.

Ephesians 5: 15-16 (NLV) so be careful how you live. Live as men who are wise and not foolish. Make the best use of your time.

3. Commit to Win

If you decide to take on the struggle you have to roll up your sleeves and realize that this is for your life. This is for your family. You, by the power of Christ can beat the system if you want to. Connect with your friends. Connect with the needs across the street.

1 Corinthians 9: 24 (NLT) you also must run in such a way that you will win.

This Christian life is about winning. We don't have to lose. We can defeat the powers of hell by the power of Jesus Christ. Until I begin to resist the urges that flow out of the sinful nature I will never discover the joy of true meaning in life. Meaning is not what you possess and what you know, but it is all about relationships with God and others. The greatest commandment is to love God and love others. Until we do this we will remain disconnected.

Many people, because they have a true hunger for connection will pursue a counter-fit. Do you remember the woman at the well? She had five husbands and the man she was living with was not her husband. She wanted to connect.

The prodigal son had a counter-fit called the party life. He was so hungry for connection that he forfeited his inheritance.

God wants us to experience true authentic community.

What is God saying to you this morning? What is God saying to you about your life? If you do nothing, it will be more of the same and it will get worse. God is our helper and we can overcome.