

Connecting - Hebrews 10:24-25

I want to start this morning with a question, are you happy? There's actually a journal called *The Journal of Happiness Studies*, and they're trying to use the tools of research to figure what is it that makes human life flourish, what produces joy. When they look at what distinguishes quite happy people from less happy people. They find that there is the one factor, one difference that consistently separates those two groups, and what I'd like to ask you to do for just a moment, if you don't mind, is turn to the person next to you and see if you can guess what that is. What's the one factor, the one difference that distinguishes happier from less happy people? Turn to the person to next to you right now. See if you can guess what that difference is.

All right. I'm going to tell you what it is, and you can see whether you or the person next to you got it right or not. It's not income. It's not how much money you have. It is not health. It's not what kind of shape your body's in. It's not security. It's not attractiveness. It is not IQ. It is not career success. What distinguishes consistently happier people from less happy people is the presence of rich, deep, joy-producing, life-changing, meaningful relationships with other human beings. Meaningful relationships, connectedness. See,

I cannot live without connection

Spending meaningful time with friends, family, people who care about us; just absolutely indispensable to human well being. Guy named Robert Putnam wrote a book recently called *Bowling Alone*. It's maybe the most influential kind of analysis of social well being in the last 10 years. This is one of the things he writes,

"The single most common finding from a half-century's research on life satisfaction not only from the US but around the world, is that happiness is best predicted by the breadth and depth of one's social connections." Robert Putnam, from *Bowling Alone*

Of course, that's not news to God because God made us that way. The Bible said this a long time ago. God created human beings, and then it says,

"It is not good for man to be alone." Genesis 2:18

Part of what it means to be made in God's image is you have this capacity for what might be called connectedness. Now, connectedness is not the same thing as knowing a bunch of people or having a lot of friends on Facebook. (Face book competition with Kaitlyn) There are some people who get a little confused about this because they have lots and lots of conversations, maybe lots and lots of context but not a lot of friends. Lots of conversations maybe, but no real connections.

Connectedness is also not the same thing as having a relationship with God – Dale, I have trusted Christ, I have real life in Him, what else do I need? Well, look at our verse again - The Bible seems to indicate in the beginning of chapter 3 that God regularly walked with Adam in the cool of the day, that this conversation wasn't abnormal – God was there, but He STILL SAID THIS...do you get it? We need someone like us to go through life with us. I cannot live just

connected to God, but disconnected with people. It is NOT good. When we sing songs that say "all of you is more than enough" and "He's all we need" – we aren't saying we can live without people, food, air, etc. We are saying that ALL that we need is found in ALL that life is in Him – and His Word says we need each other.

Jesus even touched on this – He was asked what is the most important commandment – the most important thing that we as humans can do – He said Love the Lord your God with all your heart soul mind and strength, and Love your neighbor as yourself.

I must love God AND love others

2 commands – Love God, Love others

doing the first without the second tends toward a pietistic superiority – "I don't need you, I've got God"; the second without the first tends toward humanistic independence "We don't need You, we have each other!"

I think that's why Christ said "and the second is like unto it", trying to get us to see that these two principles are so closely linked as to be almost inseparable.

You love God by loving others
 You love others by loving God!
 You can't love God well without loving others
 You can't love others well without loving God!

I cannot live without connections to people! Biblically, God says anyone who does not love abides in death...

"He who does not love abides in death." 1 John 3:14 NAS

see, death is separation – Physically, its separation from the body, spiritually, it's separation from God. John doesn't say anyone who hates, abides in death. Just the absence of love is deadly, not just physically, but spiritually and emotionally

See spiritually when I live in isolation I am more likely to give into temptation. I am more likely to give into discouragement. I am more likely to be self-absorbed. I am more likely to spend money in selfish ways. I am more likely to live in self deception, not know the truth about myself. Leading to separation from God. Death. Not even know that I'm isolated because nobody knows and loves me enough to actually let me know about this. Emotionally, isolated disconnected people are more prone to depression, anxiety, loneliness, low self-esteem, substance abuse problems, sexual addiction problems, difficulties with eating and sleeping because it is not good to be alone...that's disconnection .

Dale, if I want to be disconnected, it looks like it's my business – I'm only hurting me. NO. Not only do we hurt ourselves when we stay separate from others, other people that God places around me get cheated out of the love that God intended me to give them, they get hurt as well.

“Loners who care only for themselves, spit on the common good.” Proverbs 18:1 MSG

That word for “loners” could also be translated as “unfriendly people”. People who are disconnected leave wreckage for themselves and others wherever they go.

Now, that was never God’s intent for people. So as a way of creating built-in connectedness, He established the family. God created this dynamic expression of “ ” and that’s why it’s so powerful. That’s why we hunger for it, and hurt soooo much when it’s damaged. The Bible says it this way:

“How good and how pleasant it is when brothers dwell together in unity” Psalm 133

The psalmist says it’s like “oil running down the head, down to beard of Aaron” – this sign of God’s blessing overflowing and that God was there working on their behalf. It’s like a dry area getting rain – life can happen, life springs up – all because family is working.

But then almost right away, in this family dynamic we see brokenness, right? Adam and Eve have Cain, and then Abel. Two little boys. And how did they play together? Not very well. Family connectedness...our deepest longing, and often our biggest pain. Watch this little video of family connectedness – look at their faces closely, because I think it models the human condition quite well.

VIDEO - Charlie

That’s got to be one of the funniest and saddest things all at the same time. That’s the human condition. I trusted Charlie. I made myself vulnerable with Charlie. I stick my finger in that little circle of connectedness, and Charlie bit me. Pain and hope and joy and anger. We’re just longing how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell together in unity but they don’t. Charlie bit me. You get rejected. We get hurt. “Oh, _____ that hurt.”

So now, we still have this problem – I cannot live without connection. So God says, “Now, I’m going to start a new family. Only this is going to be a family for dysfunctional, broken, sinful people,” ...because Charlie bit me. This will be a family for Charlie and Charlie’s brother, and He offers it through Jesus, and He called it the Church.

It works like this, if anybody would come to Jesus, if I will acknowledge the truth about my brokenness, my sin, I am a sinner, and if I ask God for forgiveness, to restore me, to connect me back to Him because what Jesus did on the Cross for me, and if I repent of my sins and ask Him for power to become a new kind of person, then Jesus says, “You can be a part of my new family.” I have this ability to connect here with people who have connected here already in a unique and powerful way.

Now there’s this circle of connectedness right here (move arms around the room in small and bigger circles) and it’s why we gather together, and it’s made available to everyone. It’s a new way of life. Jesus said it this way, both giving us the principle and then the example:

"A new command I give you: Love one another. **As I have loved you**, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." John 13:34-35

And then Paul said it this way, again the principle and example:

"Accept one another, then, **just as Christ accepted you**, in order to bring praise to God." Romans 15:7

And then there are all kinds of ways to flesh this love and acceptance out, and the New Testament is replete with the ways – all of the one anothers – more reasons why we can't stay isolated, because we can't fulfill these commands:

One Another List (will get for you)

I see examples of these commands all over the body here in RC (give examples per conversations.) ...a group gathers down front here after a service and prays for something going on in one of their lives, another couple of people gather in back after the service, praising God for someone who has just trusted Christ...a group of families get together and hang out on a Saturday afternoon just because hanging out matters! We cannot live without connection.

How do I begin to build this connecting into my life, Dale? What might it look like? Turn to Hebrews 10:24-25 – the scripture will be on the screen as well – I believe this verse gives us the marks of the life-giving connections that we all need in this new family (and even some principles for our immediate family interaction):

"Let us think of ways to motivate one another to acts of love and good works. And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of His return is drawing near."
Hebrews 10:24-25 NLT

Marks of Biblical, life-giving connections:

Inspired actions

Think about it – Consider means to pay attention to, look closely at – where/how can I plug into other's lives? I sit down and figure out if I can make that purchase or do that upgrade, but this is an area where I need to be thinking as well – Where can I be used by God to encourage others to do love and good works? Where are the areas in my circle of knowledge where I can connect? Handshake on Sunday AM – a Smile – Oakwood has multiple places – from smaller group Bible studies going on this summer, to serving with other people in First Impressions, and children's ministries, to small groups that officially start up this fall again, but are going on right now, to just having a few neighbors over to your house! What if a move of the kingdom in someone's heart simple started over smores and coffee in your backyard?

Remember that Robert Putnam, the guy I mentioned earlier? Here's a quote from him that I found very interesting: "As a rule of thumb, if you belong to no groups but you decide to join one, you cut your risk of dying over the next year in half." Anyone here interested in cutting your risk of dying in half? I talked to Eric, and the new slogan for life groups this fall is: "Join a

group or die.” Something kind of positive and encouraging about that one. Seriously, take the time to THINK about how you can connect or be a force in helping someone else connect – be creative. Think about how you can motivate others, or be motivated to love and good work. That leads to the second mark of life-giving connections.

Face-to-face gatherings

This connection usually involves face to face in some way. And Here’s the thing: Every time connection happens, it’s like something’s being poured from one soul into another soul, and it has the power to heal wounds here and this person knows the joy of receiving healing and this person knows the joy of being used for healing and it is life giving to both of them and that’s connection and no one can live without it.

We must resist the human tendency for withdrawal and relational drift – get together! If you’re already a part of a little community, what does God have for your little platoon in the coming year? Inviting someone in? Serving somewhere? Launching a new group? Entering more fully into someone’s life, or open your life up for deeper interaction?

If you are involved in some sort of group or leading a any kind of group – thank you, thank you, thank you! Don’t Give up! That’s the phrase in the NIV, by the way – “Don’t give up meeting together!” And why do we need to do that? It’s a primary way of connecting, yes, but it’s also because we need people to encourage us with the 3rd Mark of life-giving connections:

Hope-filled cheers

remember what it’s all about – ‘love and good works’ Ephesians 2:10 For by grace you have been saved, now you are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God has prepared before hand for you to do!” Why were you saved? To follow Him by doing good!

remember that this isn’t all there is – He is in charge, and He is coming back – encourage one another – man we here so much negative in the news, maybe at your job, deal with so much negative on a regular basis – we need cheerleaders! You, I, need someone in our life to stand up and say: God is in charge, He loves you, He is for you, you can take that one to the bank! God has a plan for your life, your hurt, your pain, your joy, your joblessness, your bankruptcy, your relational failure, your struggle – GOD IS FOR YOU. And we get permission, and give permission by making those real connections with someone here!!

Last question for you today:

With whom will you connect/begin to connect this week?

God wants you to be in connection with another human being

This is a face-to-face, inspired, hope-filled happening that God uses to do His work in Your life – will you connect this week with someone?

Pray