

“Connect, Grow, Serve” - these are the focus the Elders have prayerfully chosen for HPC this year. Last year, “Helping People Connect” was our focus and we launched a wide variety of new groups and opportunities for HPCers to connect with each other and with others. The response was so great that we created a Session level position of Connect Elder to oversee the social life of HPC. Years ago our Deacons were charged with “A Ministry of Connection” that still guides them as they care and connect with individuals here. We may feel we do it well, but we have a long way to go. WE live in a world where people are getting more and more connected while feeling more and more disconnected. The mobility of life, the pace of life, our fascination with technology and entertainment, our push toward self-fulfillment and individualism...all wreak havoc on relationships. The Bible tells us that we were created for relationships. God said in Genesis 2:18 ***“It is not good for man to be alone.”*** Humans are not made for isolation. Why? Because we were created in the image of God. God is love and love is relational. Whether you ever marry or not is irrelevant. What matters is that we need healthy, loving relationships...with God and with others. Consider 4 metaphors or word pictures that the Bible gives us for how we, as God’s people, are to be “spiritually connected”.

WE ARE SPIRITUALLY CONNECTED LIKE BEING BUILT INTO A BUILDING.

Ephesians 2:21-22 ***“In Christ the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in Christ you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by His Spirit.”***

Together, we are God’s dwelling place. When we built this facility, it was fascinating to see how every joint and piece fit together...thousands of different parts – welded, glued, stapled, sewn, nailed – all together. It only works if all the parts fit. To be safe and to be stable in any building you have to connect things just right. If you’re not connected in a building...you are a disconnected piece. This is true in any area of life. You are in a precarious position with your life if you are not connected. At some point, for all of us, the rains will fall and our ground will shake. Jesus talked about building our life like a house on the rock of his word. Here we are told we are built together as a dwelling place for God...a spiritual temple that is living and is going to last forever...and that all Christians need to get connected to it. If you’re not spiritually connected, there is nobody there to hold you up or to walk with you when you get laid off or when you get cancer or when your parent dies. We were not meant to go through life unsupported...that is the idea of a building. We support each other.

WE ARE SPIRITUALLY CONNECTED LIKE BEING FORMED INTO A BODY.

Romans 12:4-5 ***“Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.”***

Together, we are the body of Christ. What Jesus Christ did when he was here in his physical body – he wants us to continue to do today. We are the body of Christ on the earth. Christ’s hands, feet, ears, eyes, mouth...Christ’s heart to the world. And just like our body is connected...so is Christ’s body. You can’t have a disconnected hand or toe or anything. We are all connected to each other. We are all many different parts...God designed it that way...some are hands, ears, feet...all unique as God intended. God loves variety. God doesn’t want us to be like each other. Everyone is needed. It takes every one of us to make the body of Christ. No one can say they are unimportant... when God says you are. You may just be a thumb, but without you we lose our grip. Never confuse prominence and significance. God says it all matters. What good is a hand cut off and laying there? No good. Detached it’s worthless. If it’s not connected to the body it dies. We only grow by being connected to Christ’s body. This is why small groups are so vital. We need each other.

WE ARE SPIRITUALLY CONNECTED LIKE BEING ATTACHED TO A VINE.

John 15:5 ***“I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.”***

Together, we are a fruit-bearing vine. It is interesting that Jesus, right before he goes to the cross, says if you are not going to have any fruitfulness or any productivity in your life then you are out there on your own. Again, you have got to stay connected. When you experience a spiritual connection for the first time, you know it. All of a sudden God no longer is some distant idea. God is real. There’s not an atheist in the world that can convince me that God isn’t real. Because I talk to him. Because I know Him. I’ve been a friend with Jesus Christ now for well over 40 years. Nothing could sway me from that. Why? Because I have a connection. I want you to have that kind of connection to God in 2010. It is the deepest prayer of my heart as your pastor and as somebody who loves you that you will have that connection that you say, “There’s no way I could not believe in God. I’m connected to him all the time.” In plants, a disconnected branch can’t bear fruit. You not only don’t have the support, you not only start to wither and die, but you don’t have any productivity in your life if you’re not spiritually connected. He says you’ve got to be connected to have fruit. What kind of fruit? Galatians 5:22-24 ***“The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self control.”*** Here is the point. The evidence that you are spiritually connected is you see those things in your life. If you are connected you’re going to bear fruit. And the mark that you’re not connected is you’re cut off. Somehow you got disconnected from God and you got disconnected from the body and you got disconnected from the vine. When connected, we bear spiritual fruit.

WE ARE SPIRITUALLY CONNECTED LIKE BEING BORN OR ADOPTED INTO A FAMILY.

1 John 3:1 ***“How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!”***

Together, we are God’s family. There are only two ways to get into a family...you can either be born into it or you can be adopted into it. In the Bible God does both for you. It’s called being born again and it’s called being adopted into the family of God. God does them both. The cool thing about it is in Roman law during the New Testament, you could disown a child you birthed. But if you adopted a child you were forbidden to ever disown them. God says you are not only born again into my family but I have adopted you and there is no way I could ever disown you. That’s good news! We are God’s children. We are family.

Listen up: Church is not something you go to...Church is something you belong to. What I want to do is reposition Christianity in your mind. Most people think that Christianity is a belief system. There are beliefs that are involved but it is more than that. It is a belong system. It is belonging to the family of God. It is being a part of the body of Christ. It is being built into God’s temple brick by brick, person by person. It is being grafted into the vine of Christ to bear good fruit. Connect.