

## Connecting to New Life

(We Are Better Together)

Brad Bailey – September 9, 2018

Acts 2:41-47

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1. Connecting is not simply found...it is \_\_\_\_\_.
2. Connection involves gathering in both \_\_\_\_\_ (communal) and \_\_\_\_\_ (relational) ways.\_

*Acts 5:42 (also Acts 20:20.)*

**When we gather on a relational level, we uniquely...**

1. \_\_\_\_\_ the Unity of New Life in Christ
2. \_\_\_\_\_ in the truth of New Life in Christ
3. \_\_\_\_\_ living in the New Life of Christ

Matthew 18:20  
Hebrews 10:24-25

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Intro

It's **great to see you** this morning... and to **be together**.

I imagine that if asked "**WHAT did you come to?**"...when you came to church this morning...and "**WHY did you come here this morning?**"... there would be a **variety of answers**. Each would probably be a good one. But I sense there may be more than we usually grasp.

My desire this morning is to **help us capture why we gather...** to see what God sees.

*When I consider the most basic "WHY" that leads me here, it's this:*

***Nothing has come into this world and truly engaged the real nature of our existence... like the person, purpose, and power of Jesus.***

Most historians would agree.

But it's also true on a personal level.

Imagine for a moment... someone entering your life and telling you that they know who you really are... perhaps accentuated because you never even knew who your parents were...or your ancestry... and one comes into your life who has the answer.

> **That is why we are here.**

Jesus came to restore our relationship with our true source of life and identity... our **true Father...the Creator of the universe.**

Something in our souls may sense we are being drawn... drawn to what can make sense of our longings... but something in our souls may also sense it causes us to face the problem we know is true as well.

We may realize that **we have actually rejected** the very **Father who is good.. and come seeking you**. You might think: I rejected Him? Denounced Him?

**Jesus says in essence: Precisely...**and if you recognize that... you will receive the very purpose of my life... to reconcile you... redeem you.

He declares your **true identity**... (even told some disciples... he had a new name for them... as a way to awaken that their whole identity was beyond what they had known.. He declares a new identity... **not dismissing** their **earthly reference points** or personalities...but **revealing something much larger that rooted their lives.**

He declares a **new home** ... in the heavenly realm... that is where you ultimately live.

He declares a **new family...which is everyone who receives this new life**. Your earthly family was created to be a great source of temporal life...and love... but the new life I give you restores your place in existence... a place created long ago... the place you belong.

**Eph. 1:5 (NLT)**

***"His unchanging plan has always been to adopt us into His own family by bringing us to Himself through Jesus Christ."***

We all long to belong... and Jesus reveals why:  
***You were created for community... to belong in eternal community... which shares new life with God.***

This is what the “church” is.

**The church is that which is united in Christ and the new life that exists in him and through him.**

He is offering new and true life...and that is a lot to take in. How do connect with this new life ... new identity... this new home and family? when Jesus is not simply here in bodily form? How do I we reorient life as we know? He said his presence... and truth would now continue and go forward embodies in all who receive him...and that is what the church is.

***Our connection to new life in Christ is a shared life. Jesus commissioned the church to bear his life-giving presence and purpose.***

What began was a viral movement. This is what we are given in the account of Luke in the Biblical Book of Acts.

#### **Acts 2:41-47 (NIV)**

Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day. <sup>42</sup>They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. <sup>43</sup>Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. <sup>44</sup>All the believers were together and had everything in common. <sup>45</sup>Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. <sup>46</sup>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, <sup>47</sup>praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

Quite a powerful description.

It's describing what we could call a **VIRAL movement**... something **expanding** in a way that defies control. (It's actually quite amazing for one stops to realize that the known world had already seen how power controlled human life... there were Pharaohs over Egypt...and now Caesars over the Roman Empire. It was the solidifying of military and political force... that controlled the world. Jesus... said...God's kingdom is not ruled by such forces of human control. He came to peasants. He gathered a few ordinary lives. And he set forth something that would transcend all human empires. And this is what described it's movement. It spread through this viral connection.)

Begins stating... “Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.”

**They received** what was at hand... **new life**... and they **acknowledged** this through the **outward symbol of baptism**... immersed into this new life... **but now what?** How do you begin to really reorient your life?

Did they just go back to there same life... like it was **just a club membership** ... maybe enjoy some **discounts on club merchandise**... **pre-sale access to special events.**

No. it says **They devoted themselves.**

**Acts 2:42 (NIV)**

**They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.**

**The DEVOTED themselves to connecting to that new life.**

They **didn't just dabble** in these things... they **DEVOTED** themselves to these things. To devote oneself means **to be dedicated to** it... to **give oneself deeply** to something ...**as a sustained way of life.**

**1. Connecting is not simply found...it is formed.**

**One of the great myths of relational life is that community is something *found*.**

In this fairy tale, community is simply out there – somewhere – waiting to be discovered.

We want to believe that community is out there somewhere. That all you have to do is find the right person or join the right group. When we think that community exists *somewhere* and we simply must tap into it.... it's our romantic ideas getting the best of us. We might assume that community is **not something you have to work at**; in fact, we can think that if you have to work at it, then you know it's not real community.

**The truth:** Community is **not** something you **find**; it's something you **form**.

Community is **not** something **discovered**; it is something *developed*. [1]

***"All relationships of worth are products of labor."***

We do well to realize that social media may serve real connection...but it is not the full realization of it. My iPhone has a list of "contacts"...and contacts can help connection but they are not in themselves connection. Facebook and other social media hubs can create a list call "friends"...but they cannot form friendships. Social media can serve the process...but it cannot become the end in itself.

So what we see is that what Jesus unleashed...this new community... was **not simply** some **passive utopia** that **surrounded these individuals**. It **involved devoting themselves...** to meeting together... on a **regular basis...developing relationships**.

**I have found** that I either become like a **ball drifting in the water bumping** into others ...saying: **"Let's get together..."** and rarely doing so...or ... I create regular commitments to some people.

*....And this viral movement had **something else to teach us...***

**Acts 2:46 (NIV)**

**Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together ..."**

The Christians in Jerusalem go to the temple, which for them is God's house. They consider themselves Jews who have seen the fulfillment of the Old Testament Scriptures through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. They meet regularly in the larger public setting of the

temple courts, an enormous public space. [2] But they also met in homes... which was really different. We know they were generally small and so likely only involved very small groups... and it was there that they gathering in a way that was profoundly inclusive...like family...and interactive because it was designed for conversation. And this reflects a second simple truth that can guide us.

## **2. Connection involves gathering in both larger (communal) and smaller (relational) ways.**

**Jesus himself** modeled both the value of small groups and the intentionality involved by immediately choosing and investing himself in the twelve disciples. His ministry went on to value both the larger public gatherings and the personal development of this group.

**The Book of Acts** captures the growth of the early church from 120 to 200,000. How did they process such growth?

***"(They met) day after day in the Temple courts and from house to house."...Acts 5:42 [2b]***

There are **dynamics** that are **unique to both** the **larger** and **smaller gatherings**. The larger gatherings of the church provide a unique spiritual connection...as we join our voices in worship and hear God's Word speak to us. However, there are qualities that are only manifest in smaller relationally sized groups.

*I want to finish my **highlighting three ways our new life can be cultivated** when we gather, especially in more relationally sized groups.*

**When we gather on a relational level, we uniquely...**

### **1. Embody the Unity of New Life in Christ**

When we gather... we gather in honor of being united by Christ with God as Father of us all. To appreciate how significant it is... we have to understand that such unity is what God created ... every life created to be His image bearers... who would be united ... as family. So everything that tries to define us and separate us ...is in opposition to God.

**Apart from God... our differences will always define us...and divide us.** Because there is no identity that can truly unite us.

**Jesus was breaking this down. The religious leaders** were threatened by Jesus. He confronted their **separation** and **superiority**.

But **Jesus ate with those** he as a religious leader should be separated from.

> **He was restoring what God had created. Restoring the will of God on earth.**

**Some may recall** the event we often call **Pentecost**. The risen Jesus says... don't do anything...just wait until the Spirit comes upon you. That day came 50 days later... they are

waiting in prayer... Spirit comes... people from different backgrounds began giving praise in different languages so that all could understand. The people were amazed.

In our current language...you might imagine them saying: **“What the hell is happening?”**... that’s a phrase that originally implied something so bad it **must come from hell**. In the case of Pentecost...and the way the church began to gather... they were saying essentially, **“What the heaven is happening?”** In other words... this reflects what we can only imagine as coming from God...as something we have never seen arise from earthly sources. The way Jesus transcended the separation that was so deeply rooted...the way his followers...his church... gathered and cared for one another... especially the way they gathered in their homes and broke bread together... sharing food which was a sign of including them into one’s life...to this their friends... the watching world would say: This must be the work of God.

*“Every time we gather as diverse lives... united in Christ... we are manifesting the reality of the Gospel... that we have been given a new life...that is a shared life.”*

The Gospel declares:

*“There is a grace by which every life must enter...and by which every life is then united.”*

Now we **might imagine** that they just had an **easy blissful time**... that they were without challenges in personalities... behavior...disagreements. The truth is that they were a model community but not perfect as people...in fact **a model because they weren’t perfect people**. A few chapters further on... we hear of **hypocrites ... misguided beliefs... misguided behavior**.

*Relating to people who are different can be challenging... but you’ll find it is what God is doing in all of us.*

*God is forming us...which leads to the second thing...*

When we gather on a relational level, we uniquely...

## **2. Grow in the truth of New Life in Christ**

They were learning from what the Apostles brought... which was the living testimony and truth of Christ... and that authoritative testimony would become the very basis of the New Testament Scriptures. The Scriptures bear the Apostles teaching.

**When we engage** in a **relational sized group**... we engage this living testimony together.

Illustration: It’s **like a prism**...in which the prism does not change...but is seen most completely from various angles. In the same way... God’s Word to us is unchanging ...but is understood in it’s meaning and beauty...when engaged by those with different views.

If I are honest...**I like what my light sees**... it’s the most personal... easy to see aspect. But if I value seeing more...understanding more clearly...I will value the perspective and light that others offer. [3]

When we gather... it is **not simply** getting together to share **our opinions**...but to gather around the will of God... which is the source of our new life...and to grow in that by engaging in a more personal and inter-personal way.

And a **third thing** that happens...could be summed up as

When we gather on a relational level, we uniquely...

### **3. Empower living in the New Life of Christ**

The viral movement described is really clear about this: no one was alone. They helped provide for each person on a practical level (with their possessions) but it was part of a spiritual dynamic. It wasn't some socialist forced sharing of resources being described. It is clearly speaking of what they voluntarily did...of a generosity that cared for the needs of others. They had each other's backs.

**The truth is that we tend towards an independence that defies what we actually face spiritually. The new life we have been given has an enemy.**

**Jesus is clear**... we each of us can operate with spiritual authority...**his authorization**... his extended authority...but he is **equally clear**... this world is not friendly...it will be hard ...there is an enemy. **To engage what you face... be joined with others.**

He sent them out two by two.

When he went to the garden to pray before his crucifixion... he took his closest circle with him.

**There is an enemy who will attack...and can do that by one strategy more fundamental than any other: isolation.**

Paul would later warn us...

#### **1 Peter 5:8 (NIV)**

*Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.*

How does a lion catch its prey... waits for one to become separated...isolated from the pack. Isolation... does not take work.... it can take work to get out of it.

Some of us know as we become older we can tend to become even more withdrawn.

I remember visiting the Union Rescue Mission downtown way back in my early twenties... and meeting the director George Caywood... a man renowned for his spiritual sensitivity... and one statement that stayed with me:

**"Our love of privacy has made us the loneliest people on earth."**

We need the protection...and the stability...

A young fellow who was fed up with church went to see this wise old Christian in his cabin to get some advice. He told him all the things that were bothering him about church, and how he felt that he would be better off without the company of other Christians. As he was speaking, the old man silently took the fire tongs and removed a red-hot glowing coal from the middle of the fire and set it on the hearth. The coal glowed for a while, but eventually dimmed and turned black.

He let it sit there a while and then took the tongs and places the coal back in the middle of the fire. Within seconds the coal was glowing red hot once again. The young man took the wordless lesson and left determined to stay with church.

Just as coals soon burn out when they are removed from the company of other coals, we will not last long in the faith if we are removed from true fellowship.

There is so much more at hand than you see.

I need others who may see what I don't see...help discern what is at hand.

I need others who can inspire me when I am weak.

I need others who can challenge and sharpen me. [4]

You may have some great relationships...family...old friends.. workmates... but if we value the new life which Jesus has make possible...we need to create connection to those who share that life...who can help us stay connected and grow in that life...not in opposition to other relationships...but for the sake of those other relationships.

As the Scriptures warn us...

### **Hebrews 10:24-25 (NIV)**

*Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds.*

*Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another--and all the more as you see the Day approaching.*

Closing Challenge: Dare to connect in a Daring Faith Group.

I know that there are different stages in life... young adults who naturally want to enjoy connecting with others beginning to form community here in what is often a new season and place in life.

I know there are some with young kids and careers...it's hard to even find time to have adult conversations. It will take planning...but there are groups for you.

I know there are older adults who may not feel the same appetite for like starting new friendships... I understand...but enjoying some relationships may be exactly what serves even this stage in life.

If you feel you couldn't fit with a particular group... just try another one. (If I try a restaurant... don't care it... I don't decide to never eat out again... I just enjoy trying another. Just try another one! Okay? Don't give up.)

It is all about having a new life in Jesus...and sharing in that new life....that new identity....new home... new family and the very meaning of belonging.

Closing Prayer



Closing Song: [We Are One \(Live\)](#)

**Notes:**

1. Drawn from James Emery White blog "Contacting Versus Connecting" - August 16, 2018
2. As described by: Kistemaker, S. J., & Hendriksen, W. (1953–2001). Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles (Vol. 17, p. 113). Grand Rapids: Baker Book House.  
2b. We also read his described in Acts 20:20. In the New Testament the Greek word for house, oikia, appears at least ninety times, with nine different references in Acts to believers meeting in homes (Acts 2:2-4;2:46; 5:52; 10:24-48; 16:25-34;16:40; 20:17-20;21:8-14;28:30-31.)
3. Regarding learning from others:  
"People learn from one another, just as iron sharpens iron." Prov. 27:17 (TEV)
4. Regarding the call to love and support one another:  
I Peter 2:17 - "Love your spiritual family."  
I John 4:21 - "The person who loves God must also love other believers."  
1 Tim. 3:14-15 (NCV) - "I'm writing... so you'll know how to live in the family of God. That family is the church..."  
Ephesians 2:19 - "You are members of God's very own family and you belong in God's household with every other Christian."  
Romans 12: 5 - "In Christ we who are many form one Body, and each member belongs to all the others."

Psalm 133

Behold, how good and pleasant it is  
when brothers dwell in unity![a]  
It is like the precious oil on the head,  
running down on the beard,  
on the beard of Aaron,  
running down on the collar of his robes!  
It is like the dew of Hermon,  
which falls on the mountains of Zion!  
For there the Lord has commanded the blessing,  
life forevermore.

Ecclesiastes 4:9-12

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!

Matthew 18:20 (NIV)

For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them."