

A Life of Connection

Series: The Good Life
Brad Bailey – Sept. 25, 2016

“Then the LORD God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone...” - Genesis 2:18

“His unchanging plan has always been to adopt us into His own family by bringing us to Himself through Jesus Christ.” Eph. 1:5

Four common foundations that provide connection...

1. Our Common Gift: Embrace the gift of yourself...your unique existence.

“Love your neighbor as yourself.” – Mark 12:31

2. Our Common Ground: Grasp that what we share in common is more important than our differences.

“God was pleased to have all of himself live in Christ. God was also pleased to bring everything on earth and in heaven back to himself through Christ. He did this by making peace through Christ's blood sacrificed on the cross.” - Colossians 1:19-20 (GW)

There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. - Galatians 3:28

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. - Hebrews 10:25

3. Our Common Good: Seek what serves both ourselves and others.

Companionship involves sharing and supporting the process of becoming who we and others were meant to be.

So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets. - Matthew 7:12

4. Our Common Grace: We need to relate to others with the mercy by which God relates to us.

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INTRO

Continuing in our series entitled “**The Good Life.**” We are seeking to take hold of the qualities that provide the deepest satisfaction at the end of the day...and the end of life.

Here in this image we see a moment when one might say..”**Ahhh the good life.**” (Series image is like Corona beer image...but just one individual sitting on the beach facing outward.)

”**What is he missing?**” Connection. There’s nobody with him.

Now if he had just left a big time with friends...maybe nice moment...but in part because he had been with friends.

Imagine we are looking at an image of ‘the last man on earth’ scenario. Even an introvert would find that tragic.

Could add this (add beautiful girl sitting next to him...in bad Photoshop paste)...but let’s get real
Could add this – add mass crowd – not really connected by people around us

What’s missing is real connection

> The **simple truth** is that **life is meant to be connected.**

The “Good Life” is a connected life....a life of connection.

We were created as individual beings who are **fundamentally connected.**

Genesis...account of God’s formation...refrain “and it was good”...but there was a moment... when God declares something is missing... that something was “not good.”

Genesis 2:18 (ESV)

Then the LORD God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.”

God created us to be connected to Him AND one another.

It’s not good to be alone.

- **Doesn’t mean it’s not good to spend time alone...** for many of us...Jesus wants to teach us how to spend time alone. In this text, God was speaking to being without any connection to others.
- **It’s also helpful to realize that although God then forms the woman as a mate,** it is with his union that we become co-creators of life...and so **the provision is for all human life** to which will overcome his state of being alone.

What we discover is that God is creating in human life...that which exists in God. God reveals Himself to be one God in three persons...Father, Son, and Spirit... distinct but eternally connected... and now **creates such connection for us.**

On one level we know we need connection...do this...but **at another...**it is **one of the deepest and most challenging qualities of life.**

We all long to belong. We begin life with the most **foundational need for security.**

We begin life in a womb... connected to another being in a profound way... then are being is **thrust out** into the world... and **cries out for attachment**. When an infant is brought to a mother's breast... it's not just a hunger for food ...but for connection.

But soon we begin to realize that we are not completely attached...that **we are an individual...** and that **can be frightening**. **We go through a process of individuating... often that is never really completed.**

The truth is that we spend the rest of our life working out how to live in a state of separation and attachment.

We can try to fill the need for connection.

Maybe that's the real reason that televisions were initially given the nickname of being "The Boob Tube?" [1]

We don't want to be alone...we want the presence of another...we want connection.

We can try to deny the need for connection.

We can declare we don't need anybody. It's more than simply being an individual. It's individualism. Individualism is separation without connection. We're becoming **dictators of a one-person country... our own gods... only to discover the world we rule is isolated and dark.**

In a *Rolling Stone* interview, **Trent Reznor**, the lead musician of the rock band Nine Inch Nails, muses on how his anti-religion stance helped lead him into his lapse into depression:

"In my head, that spilled over into an utter-chaos outlook: 'I don't need anything, I don't need anyone, and I don't need to believe there's any reason to anything.' It was a pretty self-centered approach. I was lonely and had a bleak outlook on everything. I think people have an inherent need for belonging..."

- **Trent Reznor** [2]

What an honest recognition of the need for connection... that it is an inherent need... something that reflects our essence... the issue of belonging is ultimately a spiritual one... a transcendent one.

> **The GOOD NEWS** is that God provides the **restoration of our true connection...with Him and with others.**

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."

> **God wanted an extension of His nature... to create those who bear His nature.** That's why we're here.

God has declared that He planned everything in the entire universe so we could be born...and so that we could belong as part of His created family.

And he created us to be in this family with others. [2b]

But how do we actually develop connection with others?

Belonging is based on what we share in common.

God gives us...

Four common foundations that provide connection.

1. Our Common Gift: Embrace the gift of yourself... your unique existence.

Connection begins with connecting with ourselves.

The biggest problem we can face is that we haven't accepted our own selves.

Much of what we call love is really using another person to validate ourselves.

If we don't find our own value...we will just seek it in another. And we will be **seeking in another what they cannot give.**

- We become like **two bankrupt businessmen** seeking to take out a loan from one another.
 - We become **like two ticks**...with no dog.
- > We must begin with embracing our own existence.

As God began to shape a people...and set forth the laws that would guide their lives... he concluded all such laws as being summed up in loving Him and loving our neighbor as our self. (Lev. 19:18)

Jesus declared afresh the call to...

"Love your neighbor as yourself." – Mark 12:31

"...as yourself"... is very clear that we must have a self that we affirm. If we don't embrace our own selves as valid...we will use people to validate us. We may want to think we are seeking to be connecting....but it will really be consuming... or being consumed. It takes two to connect.

I'm not suggesting that we become selfish...but nor can we simply become self-less in the complete sense of the word. We need to be self-full people.. I don't mean this in some type of pop-psychology self-help way...but as a responsibility to others to embrace that God is the source of our value...and our lives are a gift.

Mother Teresa who founded the most profound work of loving the least... starting with the most left aside lives in Calcutta India...said [2c]...

"In our efforts to listen to God's words to us, we often neglect what might be called his 'first word' to us. This is the gift of ourselves to ourselves: our existence, our nature, our personal history, our uniqueness, our identity. All that we have, and indeed, our very existence, is one of the unique and never-to-be-repeated ways God has chosen to express himself in space and

time. Each of us, because we are made in God's image and likeness, is yet another promise that he has made to the universe that he will continue to love it and care for it."

There is no substitute. If you want to find connection, you **must begin with facing** yourself...and seeking to allow God speak to you.
You must go to your Maker.

The second foundation we must embrace is our...

2. Our Common Ground: Grasp that what we share in common is more important than our differences.

Community is a term that we use in reference to a lot of areas of life...but the very word refers to "common unity." Real community is experienced in relationship to what we understand and are able to share in common.

Community flows from the discovery and development of the common ground and the common good we can share with others.

This is where connection flows from.

Sound simple? Here lies the challenge –

The loss of some transcendent connection **gives rise to a tendency to find identity through our differences and distinctions.**

If someone asked you "Who are you?" Our most common response usually involves what distinguishes us. We tend to identify ourselves as Man / Woman.... Young / Old.... White / Black / Brown... Poor / Rich... Democrat / Republican.

The problem is not with the differences...it's with the loss of the massive common ground and common good that unites us. Our differences become that which divide us if there is nothing that can truly unite us.

This is what God has broken in Christ.

Colossians 1:19-20 (GW)

"God was pleased to have all of himself live in Christ. God was also pleased to bring everything on earth and in heaven back to himself through Christ. He did this by making peace through Christ's blood sacrificed on the cross."

When we are reunited through Christ with God as our Father...as the source over all...we are **united again in our common bonds.** Our differences become secondary.

Jesus kept confronting the separation and superiority he found in humanity. He tells his fellow Jewish listeners a story... about who their neighbor is...and he introduces a Samaritan...then he makes him the hero of the story...the one who acted more as a true

neighbor. What was he doing? He was confronting the secondary sources of identity that were the source of false separation and superiority. And he wants to do that to each of us.

This is what the **Apostle Paul** grasped this when he declared...

Galatians 3:28 (NIV)

There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

He is declaring that **when we are restored in relationship with God...** through Christ...we must realize that **all other sources of identity – ethnicity, culture, working status, gender...are secondary.**

They are a part of our identity. But **what unites us is greater than what distinguishes us.** From this we can discover and develop the common ground and common good.

This isn't easy.

We have a tendency to divide up the world as “us” and “them”... and we need to discover that in far more ways there is just “us.”

Each of us will have to confront some deceptive identity attachments. [3]

Each of us have **attachments to the secondary aspects of our life** (gender, ethnicity, age, etc) that we have found **too much identity in...pride in...comfort in.**

Ask you to take a moment..

Think of one person you know ...and think of what you share in common.

What might be common needs....need you share in common? (Gave about 20 seconds) How about challenges you may share in common? (Gave about 20 seconds) If time allowed we could continue by considering fears we share in common...joys we share in common. The point is...if we will begin to think in those terms...we can discover that we share far more in common than we often realize...and that is the space by which we can connect.

It is such common ground that **creates connection...companionship.**

The word “companion”, from the Latin *com* “with” and *panis* “bread”... is literally “with whom one eats bread.”

The English “companion”, the Spanish “companionero”, the Italian “compagno”, and the French “copain” all come from the Latin meaning “with whom one eats bread.”

To eat bread with another... reflects that they are **included in one's sphere of life.**

Sharing bread means we have made space to share life.

This is what got Jesus into so much trouble. It was who he shared life with. He didn't share their moral choices... their political positions... but he shared in their humanity.

In a very profound sense we do this every time we gather as we are today. We are declaring to the past ruler of the world...that has sought to divide and destroy us...that we no longer find our identity in attachments to the differences that claim us.

Do you realize how **subversive** that is? How **defiant**? That is power of gathering together. It's a **defiant declaration**.

(So when someone asks you did this weekend...tell that what you did Friday night....Saturday...and then that on Sunday you gathered in a subversive movement of lives to declare defiance of the previous ruler of the world and declared the true nature of humanity. Then ask them..."So what did you do?")

And **because we are standing in such opposition to the nature of this world...and even the nature that is familiar within us...we need to be intentional about joining others** around common desire (life with God) in an ongoing way.

Hebrews 10:25 (NIV)

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.

We need one another to develop the new life God is calling us to live in relationship to Him. **We need a team to develop**. A team gets to know our strengths... and our weaknesses...and helps us develop.

Today...to have any meaningful continuity, we **have to form our team...our "village."**

That is what a Home Church or similar support group are...they are a team you develop with

We gather around something bigger than ourselves. This leads to the third foundation for connection...

3. Our Common Good: Seek what serves both ourselves and others.

As we heard, the call is to **love our neighbors as ourselves**. There is a **mutual good**.

Conflict is rooted in focusing on **competing good**... different needs.

But **there always is a common good that we can find**.

There are some elements of another that we may not be able to accept as common...they may be bad...but there is always a common good. **Can we find companionship with those who don't share our beliefs...or our commitment to God?** Absolutely. I have developed a level of companionship with some fellow parents...and there is a sharing and supporting of becoming better parents...which is part of who I am meant to be. They help me become a better parent. And at various degrees...there is some aspect of my God designed humanity that many can serve.

We need to seek the common good in relationship to the wider community (where we live)...in our friendships...and in our marriages.

Ultimately, spiritual companionship is **sharing and supporting the process of becoming who we and others were meant to be. If I want to embrace who I truly am through Christ... then I am going to seek others who share that...and can help me become that.**

And that involves a mutual process.

It's when we let what Jesus called for...actually begin to shape us:

Matthew 7:12 (NIV)

So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.

The truest good is that which serves both ourselves and our neighbor. [4, 5]

We will fail... we will disappoint...and this leads to the final foundation for a connected life...

4. Our Common Grace: We need to relate to others with the mercy by which God relates to us.

Some of us... are **judgmental**. Not just critical minds...but critical hearts.

Some of us...when something we believe is wrong... or not fair...**we don't just raise the issue...we raise a wall.**

We demand justice...and condemn another to separation.

But God...not only embraces justice...He reached beyond in mercy.

Calls us to be those who can be connected in our common grace.

[Closing **COMMUNION**:]

We are going to conclude with an opportunity to receive that common grace. Christ came to provide connection.

He came to reach us.

He bore the separation we were due...so we could never be separated from God again.

He became our common grace.

On his last night... he said broke the bread of the Passover meal and said that he would not become the bread of common grace that we can share in. he said that whenever we gather.... We should receive that bread which symbolizes our common grace with one another. He is the bread we share. And similarly...he raised the cup and declared that he would shed his blood for us...and the cup of juice would now represent his blood given for us to find life.

I invite you to take a minute...and reflect...and offer to God whatever you are recognizing in your heart to be a source of separation. It could be a source of superiority that limits connection...or a source of inferiority that separated you. Then come and receive these elements... our common grace.

Notes:

1. The actual use of “boob tube” was related to “boob” being slang for stupid thoughtless, etc...and TV’s having a tube inside as main source of image.

“As television became the increasingly dominant form of mass communication, critics complained of how poorly the medium lived up to its promise of serving the public interest, most notably in Newton N. Minow's 1961 speech describing the "vast wasteland" that was television programming of the day. Television was characterized as the "boob tube", a mindless occupation and time filler.[1]

Source(s):http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_aspe...

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Boob_tube

2. Citation: Anthony Bozza, "The Fragile World of Trent Reznor," *Rolling Stone* (10-14-99), p. 140;

2b. *Now the idea of being family can strike us differently depending in part by how we have experienced earthly family lives. It may strike us with both a sense of warmth... and a sense of wanting.* The family experience is what shapes our entire sense of BELONGING... serves as the REFERENCE POINT for our place in the world. For some of us, our earthly experience of belonging has been a good and helpful taste of what God intends family to be.... For others of us.... feel adrift... all of us.... there is a level of ultimate connection that eludes us.

2c. Mother Teresa, Leadership, Vol. 10, #4

Bonhoeffer wrote much about the relationship of solitude and community. He said:

“Let him who cannot be alone beware of community... Let him who is not in community beware of being alone... Each by itself has profound perils and pitfalls. One who wants fellowship without solitude plunges into the void of words and feelings, and the one who seeks solitude without fellowship perishes in the abyss of vanity, self-infatuation and despair.” - Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together: The Classic Exploration of Faith in Community*

3. Along with identity attachments, **many of us long for community... but have never given up our individualism. Individuality is from God... but not individualism. Individualism is a way of life that makes the individual supreme or sovereign over everything.**

Individuation reflects the nature of discovering that one is an individual... connected and yet separate. The tragedy is that the soul is no longer returning to a defining common bond and is often left adrift.

Individuation is never being completed... and the result is an individualism that we may find easy because it demands nothing ... but excludes us from real life. Individualism is separation without connection. We're becoming dictators of a one-person country... our own gods... only to discover the world we rule is isolated and dark.

4. The centrality of loving other as ourselves is echoed in these texts as well:

Romans 13:10

Love does no wrong to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the Law.

Galatians 5:14

The entire Law is fulfilled in a single decree: "Love your neighbor as yourself."

James 2:8

If you really keep the royal law stated in Scripture, "Love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing well.

This common god is reflected in the command to share one another's burden.

Galatians 6:28

"Share each other's burdens, and in this way obey the law of Christ."

A great place to start is simply to be with the person, asking questions, getting to know them as another human being, helping to carry their loneliness, fear, or doubt.

5. Some may wonder about what we read in in the Bible about not being "unequally yoked"...and there is a valuable caution to be had. What is being described by being "yoked" is some degree of covenant partnership...marriage...business. Covenants are of another order. And to enter a covenant without the same central allegiance... view of reality...is dangerous. Notably if one is in such, the counsel is to honor it if the other will accept our new allegiance. See 2 Cor. 6:14-18. When we seek common ground...we are seeking that which is truly common...that which we can truly share in that honors God. Paul was equally committed to this. "I try to find common ground with everyone, doing everything I can to save some." -1 Corinthians 9:21-23]