

Connect with God and Others

Pastor Jason Carter - January 8, 2023

The theme for our Good News family in 2023: **Let's Go!** God wants to take both our church family and you as an individual to where we have never been before.

Let's go, church. Let's **BE** the church.

God wants to lead us like Joshua in the Bible.

- Have courage, you have never been this way before.
- God asks us to take a step, but He is already at work.
- Know Him, hear Him, trust Him and walk with Him.

Remember our Vision Statement: We live to see lives transformed through Jesus

- Connecting is one of our three pillars (Connect, Disciple, Empower)
- Connect with God and connect with others

Connecting with God

John 15: 1-8 *"I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit He prunes so that it will be even more fruitful."*

- This is connection, this is relationship
- Our life is found in Him
- He desires for His life to flow into us
- He desires for us to be fruitful
- He desires for His life to bring transformation to ours

"You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me."

Transformation is *noticeable*. It *changes* us and people will *see* it.

- This is a choice, a conscious decision
- Not "I have to" but "I want to know you, I want to be transformed by You, I want to be with You"
- When we connect with God and enter His rest, we learn to lean into Him and trust His character.

As we enter our annual fast, keep this in mind:

- Know what you will fast and have a plan
- Pick a definitive time to meet with God
- Read the Bible, pray scripture and what's in your heart, invest time meeting with God
- Practice being and sitting with the Lord in silence
 - If you need healing, sit with Him and receive healing
 - If you need strength, sit with Him and receive His strength
 - If you have anxiety, sit with Him and receive His peace

- Select a fast partner
- Ask God questions
- Write/journal 2023 questions/revelations
- Trust God with the results

Prayer:

There are several different types of prayers. Prayer is a practice; practice offering all different types to the Lord.

- Adoration/worship/Thanksgiving
- Confession
- Requests/Supplication
- Intercession
- Silence and solitude
- Questions- How can I enjoy you more? What do you want to show me? What do you like about Me?

Obstacles in the fast:

- Silence your phone and set it aside
- Be ok with a sense of boredom
- Limit distractions
- Sleep if you need to sleep
- Realize you may be more irritable or quickly frustrated
- Keep an attitude of expectation

Temptations and frustrations may increase, but trust that transformation is happening!

As we fast, remember that we are not trying to pry things from God's hands, but rather we are engaging Him, building history, positioning ourselves to know Him, be utilized by Him and bring heaven to earth. God is a personal God and desires connection with each of us.

- How can I connect with God during the next 21 days?
- How does the Lord want to speak to me?
- What does God want to reveal to me? About me? About Himself?

Connecting with others

Reflect on these verses in the context of connecting to others.

John 15 "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples."

You are the branches- "You" is plural. We are not individual Christians. Biblical community is essential to our growth. It is not an option but an essential component to living out our faith. The Bible is in context of family; relationships of people pursuing the Lord **TOGETHER**.

Romans 1:11-12 "I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong- that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith."

We should be together, encourage each other, bear each other's burdens and be mutually encouraged by each other's faith.

Hindrances to connecting with others

Christianity is invasive.

- People are messy and can be difficult sometimes.
- We all have issues, personality quirks, and sinful patterns.

We can be both selfish and loving, impatient and grace-filled, reactive in the flesh or responsive to the Spirit. It is the paradox of Christianity- we are saved by grace.

Don't put an idealistic spin on the church.

- If Paul and Barnabas had an angry confrontation and split from working together, why do we have an idealistic idea that church will be perfect? It isn't and will never be.

If you are a believer, you don't get to sit out, opt out, check out, or tap out. We are commanded to engage and connect.

- God, who do you want me to connect with?
- Who do you want me to invite?
- Who do you want me to partner with as we walk out our faith?

Christianity is shifting and, right now, it seems that culture is winning. We live in an overstimulated and under satisfied culture. We want what is real but don't want to, and often times, won't pay the price for real.

As a follower of Christ, we don't get to *sit out, opt out, check out or tap out*. We are commanded to *engage and connect*.

As we enter this fast:

There are three ways our view of God is impacted or affected.

1. Theology tries to **explain** God, but remember that information does not mean we know Him or His character.
2. Denominations try to **contain** God. They do their best to interpret the Bible and create rules, restriction and limitations. Typically, this is done because we want to know God and not fall in error. They help us to know boundaries, but no denomination has everything all figured out.
3. Experiences **constrain** God. Our brain creates a narrative, and we believe that lie. Partial truths might exist, but we believe the half truths and create narratives that limit God or are completely false. (God didn't answer this way, so He can't be trusted, He isn't my provider, my Healer, etc).

- Which one of these three affect my walk with God the most?

God at the zoo

Imagine the zoo is where we would go to meet God. Imagine each of the animals represented something about His nature or His character. We are going to see what God is like.

To see the beauty of God, we would go to see the peacock, exotic birds, or a Bengal tiger.

To see the creativity, ingenuity and intelligence; the beaver, the ants, or the dolphins.

To see the strength; the rhino, the elephant or the gorilla.

To see the fun; the monkeys, the otters, or the baby goats.

To see the uniqueness; the giraffe, the sloth, or perhaps the duck billed platypus.

To see the gentleness; the deer, the butterfly, or the manatee.

To see the mystery; the swamp.

To see the ferocity and power; the lions.

Sometimes when we go to the zoo and watch the animals, what we wanted to see or expected to see, is very different from what we actually see and experience. Sometimes in our Christian walk, we look at God like we look at animals in the zoo.

"Do something."

"Show me something."

"Perform."

- How many of our lives have revealed the zoo version of God?

We are comfortable with something contained, domesticated, or something we can visit on our terms. We want predictable, not anything that would make us inconvenienced or uncomfortable. We don't really want to know what He wants. We don't really want to be inconvenienced. We would rather have a god that is predictable, if not boring.

- We want a domesticated God; one that we can handle, one that doesn't ask much of us.
- We tell God what we think He should do and take this all-powerful, all-consuming God and then want Him to serve us.
- When He doesn't, we make up stories to explain why.
- So it is with faith. We want a God we can explain, a God we can contain and a God we can constrain.

If we wanted to experience and know what an animal is really like, we would have to make a decision to meet on their terms. The same can be said about God.

We want people to see God but often we bring them to God like He is a caged animal in the zoo. Controlled and powerless, caged, docile, and there to be seen. We don't want Him to make a mess in our lives. Then we are surprised when nonbelievers want something else, something more.

- All of us are really intrigued and hungry for God and yet afraid of God at the same time.
- What will He ask of Me? Or maybe, what will He take from Me?

God is asking:

Do you want to know Me or do you just want to explain Me?

Do you want to know Me or do you just want to contain Me?

Do you want to know Me or do you just want to constrain Me?

Are you willing to meet Me as I am?

- What are the consequences of living with a “domesticated” version of God?
- What do I need to give up in order to experience God “in the wild?”
- Why am I afraid to meet God on His terms?
- What steps do I need to begin to take in order to meet God in the “wild”?
- God, which one of your attributes (beauty, power, creativity, mystery, gentleness, etc.) do you want me to experience in 2023?