

CONNECTED – Uniting People February 25, 2018

James 4:8 Come close to God, and God will come close to you...

If we draw near to God, He'll draw near to us. He's always willing & able, but we have to do our part & start plugging in & seeking Him.

Colossians 1:18 Christ is the head of the church, which is His body. He's the beginning, supreme over all...

Christ has united Himself to His people & chooses to do His work in the world through local congregations which are "the body of Christ"

Colossians 2:19 they're not connected to Christ, the Head of the body...

PAUL'S MESSAGE TO THE CHURCH IN EPHESUS

Ephesians 1:18 I pray that your hearts will be flooded w/ light so you can understand the confident hope He has given to those He called; His holy people who are His rich & glorious inheritance.¹⁹ I pray that you'll understand the incredible greatness of God's power for us who believe Him. This is the same mighty power ²⁰ that raised Christ from the dead & seated Him in the place of honor at God's right hand in the heavenly realms.²¹ He's far above any ruler, authority, power, leader or anything else; not only in this world but also in the world to come. ²² God's put all things under the authority of Christ & has made Him head over all things for the benefit of the **church**.²³ The **church** is His body; it's made full & complete by Christ, who fills all things everywhere w/ Himself.

Ephesians 1:22 MSG ...Christ rules the church. The church isn't peripheral to the world, the world is peripheral to the church. The church is Christ's body, in which He speaks & acts, by which He fills everything w/ His presence.

God's already decided the church will succeed.

The Father exalted Jesus as head over everything for the church! The church isn't a means to an end. The church is the end. Local congregations gathered by God are so valuable. That's why the primary strategy for evangelism in the New Testament is through churches. Acts records Paul went to one city after another, preached the gospel, gathered a few converts, & established a church. Then he went back & appointed elders to lead these local congregations.

Why did Paul do this? Because God's great purpose is more than that people should be converted. Bringing this new community into existence is His plan of salvation. It's not an extra. The head works through the body. Paul did more than lead people to Christ. That's only half of it. He planted churches—local congregations of believers gathered by God to worship and then sent out by God to serve.

Ephesians 2:19 ...you Gentiles are no longer strangers and foreigners. You're citizens along w/ all of God's holy people. You're members of God's family. 20 Together, we're His house, built on the foundation of the apostles & the prophets. The cornerstone is Christ Jesus Himself. 21 We're carefully joined together in Him, becoming a holy temple for the Lord. 22 Through Him you Gentiles are also being made part of this dwelling where God lives by His Spirit.

"If the church is a temple, Christ is the Builder, the Foundation, the Cornerstone; if the church is a bride, Christ is the Bridegroom; if the church is a flock, Christ is the Shepherd."

Ephesians 3:10 God's purpose was to use the church to display His wisdom in its rich variety to all the unseen rulers & authorities in the heavenly places. 11 This was His eternal plan, which He carried out through Christ Jesus our Lord. 12 Because of Christ & our faith in Him, we can now come boldly & confidently into God's presence.

You might be thinking, I'd rather do my own thing for Christ. But is that what Christ wants you to do? You say, "I don't want to get tied up with the church." But that's what Jesus has chosen to do. Why does our glorious Head join Himself to such a feeble body? Isn't that amazing that He'd do that? The church is where He chooses to display His glory.

Romans 12:4 Just as our bodies have many parts & each part has a special function, 5 so it is w/ Christ's body. We're many parts of one body & we all belong to each other.6 In His grace, God's given us different gifts for doing certain things well. If God's given you the ability to prophesy, speak out w/ as much faith as God's given you. 7 If your gift is serving others, serve them well. If you're a teacher, teach well. 8 If your gift is to encourage others, be encouraging. If it's giving, give generously. If God's given you leadership ability, take the responsibility seriously. If you have a gift for showing kindness to others, do it gladly.

5 Lies/Excuses We Use For Why We Won't Connect To Church:

- 1. I don't need a church people.** Yes, you do. You can choose your friends, but you can't choose your family. If you're born again, you're part of the family of God. That means you get the good, the bad, & the ugly. Like it or not, family is family! F.O.E. When things are good, it's easy to think we can do it by ourselves, but when disaster strikes, we realize how important the family of God is.
- 2. I've been burned before.** Sincerely, "I'm sorry". But don't throw the baby out w/ the bath water. A bad past experience w/ a church/leader, doesn't mean that our church will be the same. Let me encourage you to give it another try. Hope again. Forgive. Be healed. Have faith. Trust.
- 3. I'm too busy.** No, you're not. The solution to this is that our busyness requires that we reprioritize our lives and we make growing closer to Jesus and each other higher up on our list of priorities.
- 4. No community/church would accept me.** Yes, we will. Let me say everyone has a story & a past. Church is a place where we can come to be accepted & comforted when our lives have crashed down around us.

5. **I'm scared of the unknown.** That's real, & so are we. Walk by faith... Trust in the Lord... Take a risk. The long-term benefits > the possible short-term uneasiness of something new.

Let's not be churchless Christians! We need the church. We need to be connected to the church & to one another.

Planted in the House!!

Psalms 92:12 AMP The uncompromisingly righteous will flourish like the palm tree [be long-lived, stately, upright, useful, & fruitful]; they'll grow like a cedar in Lebanon [majestic, stable, durable, & incorruptible]. 13 Planted in the house of the Lord, they'll flourish in the courts of our God. 14 Growing in grace, they'll still bring forth fruit in old age; they'll be full of sap, spiritual vitality & rich in the verdure of trust, love, & contentment. 15 They're living memorials to show that the Lord is upright & faithful to His promises;

When you're planted in the House, I believe you'll be flourishing life & you're able to bless others because of it. People will flourish if they're planted in a local church that teaches the Word of God. Our families will prosper & grow as we walk w/ God & follow His plan.

I Will Build My Church!!

Matthew 16:16 Peter answered, "You're the Messiah, the Son of the living God." 17 Jesus replied, "You're blessed Simon, because My Father in heaven has revealed this to you. You didn't learn this from any human being. 18 Now I say to you that you're Peter (which means 'rock'), & upon this rock I will build my church, & all the powers of hell will not conquer it. 19 And I will give you the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven. Whatever you forbid on earth will be forbidden in heaven, and whatever you permit on earth will be permitted in heaven."

The gates of hell will not prevail against us and every nation will hear the Gospel before Jesus comes again. Being planted in a local church is vital to spiritual, emotional, & relational growth.

Christ is committed to work through the church, why wouldn't we do the same? Jesus is building the church, isn't that what we should be doing? Since Christ loves the church, shouldn't we love her, too? Why wouldn't we want to be doing what He's doing?

Sharing our lives w/ one another & developing Godly relationships w/ in the body of Christ is extremely important, especially for a church that is on the move. But what does a church like that look like? Is there a pattern or example for us to follow? I'm glad you asked:

Acts 2:42 All the believers devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching & to fellowship & to sharing in meals, including the Lord's Supper, & to prayer. 43 A deep sense of awe came over them all, & the apostles performed many miraculous signs & wonders. 44 All the believers met together in one place & shared everything they had. 45 They sold their property & possessions & shared the money w/ those in need. 46 They worshiped together at the Temple each day, met in homes for the Lord's Supper, & shared their meals w/ great joy & generosity 47 all the while praising God & enjoying the goodwill of all the people. And each day the Lord added to their fellowship those who were being saved.

LET'S STAY CONNECTED to the Body of Christ. Whether you change jobs, have a baby, retire, experience the death of a loved one, enter a new chapter of your life, whatever comes your way-stay connected. Don't go it alone. Draw from the strength of others. Feel the stability of a deeply rooted community of faith. Let God's Spirit flow through your veins and keep you strong and healthy through the various transitions of life we all experience.