



* **“MAKING A CONNECTION”**

Biblical Text: Ephesians 5:15-21

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For five weeks, we’ve been looking at some advice to help us find a better pace of life than the one we usually lead, where we often run close to **“running on empty!”*

Specifically, we’ve been looking at three steps recommended by a pastor from Saddleback Church in California - Doug Fields: **“Stop, Be Quiet, Make a Connection.”*¹

And they sound so simple. But each one has its own set of challenges.

**“Stop.”* So simple to say, crazy hard to do. For some it’s taking a little, *minute* slice of time from our busy schedules for ourselves and for God. For many of us it’s even harder to turn off our brains that keep us always worried about what comes next.

**“Be Quiet.”* We know how to be quiet! But *actually* stopping talking, or creating quiet space from the noise of the constant news, the usual buzz of activity, and the internal torrent of feelings about life, family, or the world? It’s so stinking hard!

“Make a Connection.”* You’d think that one would be the easiest for us. I mean, on one level, we are connected to a degree unprecedented in human history. We plugged in all the time with text, phone, twitter, Facebook and a world of data at our fingertips. Of course, our 1940s / 1960s building has the worst cell phone coverage – well, it does - but at least we do have Wi-Fi! **But in other ways we are disconnected.

Sociologists and social commentators have noticed the impact of the information age, most notably Harvard professor **Robert Putnam*. He went from obscurity to prominence with his book about fifteen years ago called Bowling Alone.² In it he documents the decline in community in American over the previous four decades.

**He* cites the decline of community seen in a drop in those joining bowling leagues, civic and bridge clubs, sororities, and Churches. And that the decline is due to **dual* incomes, a mobile society, generational change and a high-tech, low touch culture.

But Putnam’s analysis undervalues how new generations are using the very tools that have replaced the gathering places of the *“joiner culture”* to stay connected and build community – so much so that my children and today’s students are some of the most connected people ever. **The* connections are coming in bars, coffeehouses, and clubs, and through text, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and other social media.

¹ Fields, Doug. Refuel: An Uncomplicated Guide to Connecting with God. Copyright © 1973, Thomas Nelson. Hardcover Edition.

² Putnam, Robert. Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community. Copyright © 2000, Simon and Schuster.

*And I am grateful that old folks like me can *connect* through Facebook with our family and friends literally all over the world. I can text my son in Alaska and connect regularly on Facetime with our *Alaska grandkids. Our big challenge is that Ann and I ask every time the other gets a text / email, *“What did they say? What did they say?”*

Every relationship needs connection. It’s true in our loving relationships, with our *family and friends, and it’s true with God. That’s why *Jesus came. And even quick times of connection help us connect the dots and keep our souls full. *

God doesn’t judge the quantity of the time in which we connect. It’s wonderful if you can carve out an hour for prayer or reading Scripture. It is. But even if your times of connection are messy, speedy, and come in short bites, the God who loves you loves your attempts to make time for him. **Your desire to connect brings Him joy!**

*Scripture is full of practical reminders of how to connect with God. Sometimes that direct advice helps us keep our feet on the ground. So, if you take out your Bibles and turn to Ephesians 5 with me, we’ll find some direct advice starting at verse 15:

**“Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise.” (Ephesians 5:15)*

**“Do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.” (Ephesians 5:17)*

I’m not the only one here who would benefit from this daily prayer. *“Make me wise today, O Lord, and if I can’t be wise, please keep me from being stupid. Amen.”*

**“Make the most of the time, because the days (are filled with) evil.” (Ephesians 5:16)*

How we use our time matters. Most of the sin that we get involved in is when we do what we know we shouldn’t do, or say what we shouldn’t say. Consider the impact it would have if beforehand, we stopped to pray, *“Lord, is this right?” “Is it good?”*

**“Do not get drunk with wine ... but be filled with the Spirit.” (Ephesians 5:18)*

Now that’s good advice. But I want to observe this is not a ban on drinking wine - some of you are relieved - but a word of caution about excess. If you are going to be high on something – be high on the joy that comes from the Spirit of the Living God!

**“Sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs; make melody in your heart.” (Ephesians 5:19)*

The songs of faith are a great spiritual resource. Once we sing those words, they keep living in our memories. But there’s something more. This verse says you can have a song in your heart even if you can’t sing a note! Good news for some of you!

**“Give thanks to God the Father at all times and in everything...” (Ephesians 5:20)*

In all things we can give thanks. Not the usual translation, *“for everything”* – I find that simply impossible to do. But in all times, I can stop and give thanks to God.

*Finally, *“Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ.” (Ephesians 5:21)* ³

³ References from Ephesians 5:15-21. Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Copyright © 1989 the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

None of us is called to be a Christian alone. There are no lone ranger heroes in the faith business. Instead we are neighbors, friends, mothers, fathers, sons and daughters, who are privileged to be part of doing life together.

In his powerful book on community, *Life Together*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer said this, **“Though we are called by Christ alone, the call was not meant for you to be alone.”*⁴ We need each other. That’s the best reason to join a Church like Old Mission. People matter here. All people matter here. We need one another. As Pope Francis recently said: **“No one becomes a Christian alone; and no one stays a Christian alone.”*⁵

Living the life God desires for you doesn’t mean you will be perfect at connecting with him all the time. **But if you learn to maintain even brief times of connection with God, you’ll be moving toward consistency and greater intimacy with God.*

You don’t have to take spiritual retreat every month to stay connected, or spend hours in prayer each day, or memorize enough Scriptures to become a scholar. Those things can be helpful - but you can make connection with God part of your daily life!

There’s no perfect prescription for a deeper connection with God. But I have some practical suggestions about things each of us can do, if you need a place to start.

- * When you put on your shoes, pray to God, “Lord, direct my path today.” Psalm 23:3.*
- * Each time you take a drink of water, remember that Jesus said that those who come to him will never be thirsty. John 4:14 pray “Let me thirst for more of you, O Lord.”*
- * When you read an email, or a text, or a letter, stop for just a moment and remember Jesus’ words from John 15:5, “I am the vine. Stay connected to me and you will grow and bear fruit.” Then pray, “Lord Jesus, help me stay connected to you.”*

** Thank God that He accepts you as a work in process. He does. Those words certainly apply to me. Sometimes I blow it, get it wrong. Forget that God is there with me. So do you. It’s OK. Trust God in your “unfinishedness.”*

I restore stringed instruments as a hobby, and I learned this truth a long time ago. *“Master Crafters are in the business of bringing unfinished projects to completion.” **

And that’s what God does in and for us. Join me in prayer:

Lord, thank you for accepting me as I am, and allowing my faith to be messy, and imperfect. Thank you for giving me permission to hang an “*under construction*” sign around my neck. Help me to pursue connections with you. Help me to see my life through your eyes and to know that you will be continuing to work in me. Amen.

⁴ Bonhoeffer, Dietrich, *Life Together*, Copyright © 1959, German, translated 1964 into English, reissued 1993, Harper Collins. Pg. 77.

⁵ Pope Francis, Vatican address, June 25, 2014