

## INTRODUCTION

We are the connected generation. We’re connected through our cell phones, our pagers, and especially through our computers as we connect to World Wide Web of information. Computers have revolutionized our lives. Remember when we used typewriters to prepare papers? Back in the days before the computer generation, we had to know how to spell correctly. But since we now have spell checkers in our word processors, studies have shown young people are losing the motivation to learn how to spell. But having a spell checker doesn’t prevent mistakes, because in the English language there are many words that sound the same, but have different meanings.

Consider the following poem:

Eye halve a spelling chequer  
It came with my pea sea  
It plainly marques four my revue  
Miss steaks eye kin knot sea.  
Eye strike a key and type a word  
And weight four it two say  
Weather eye am wrong oar write  
It shows me strait a weigh.  
As soon as a mist ache is maid  
It nose bee fore two long  
And eye can put the error rite  
Its rare lea ever wrong.  
Eye have run this poem threw it  
I am shore your pleased two no  
Its letter perfect awl the weigh  
My chequer tolled me sew.

Are you wearing your Connected bracelet? I’m asking you to wear it for 40 days to remind you to stay connected to God through a daily time of Bible Study and prayer. It will also allow you to identify other members of the Green Acres family, so you can connect with some new Christian friends. It’s also to serve as a conversation catalyst. When people ask you about the bracelet you can share with them it is a reminder to you that you are connected to God through Jesus.

Two weeks ago I shared with you about how important it is be Connected to Your Creator. Last week we talked about being Connected Through Your Church. Today we’re going to consider the topic of being Connected to Your Community.

The word “community” can mean several things. Community is created within our church whenever small groups meet together and share fellowship and love in Jesus’ name. But in this message I’m using the word “community” to describe everyone and everything “out there” beyond the walls of our church. I’m talking about the people and the organizations around us who are not part of Green Acres Baptist Church or any other church for that matter. This is the “community” where we need to establish and maintain a positive connection if we are going to be the kind of church God wants us to be.

God so loved the world that He sent His Son to us, and now God has sent us out into our world to share the good news. A church cannot be content to be a fortress where Christians come to hide out from the world. We are an equipping center to prepare people to go out and carry the love of God to our community.

In our scripture passage today, we meet a man who was changed by Jesus and then he went out and connected with His community. We aren't going to read the entire chapter, so let me give you the background to our passage. Jesus and His disciples arrived by boat on the other side of the Sea of Galilee and as soon as they beached their boat they encountered a man who was dominated by demons. We don't know the man's name, so let's just call him Demonized Dave. Dave was so troubled he lived among tombs, ran around naked, and couldn't be shackled with chains—a wild man! Demonized Dave came screaming down the slope toward Jesus and His friends. I can imagine some the disciples were scrambling back into the boat!

Dave ran up to Jesus and said, “What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the most High God? Swear to God that you won't torture me.” (Mark 5:7) Jesus demanded to know the name of the demon. The demon replied, “Legion, for we are many.” A Roman Legion was about 6,000 soldiers, so poor Dave was controlled by thousands of wicked urges and a multitude of horrible appetites—he was a mess.

There was a herd of swine on a hillside near the lake, and the demons begged Jesus to cast them into the pigs, and Jesus granted their strange request. So Jesus commanded the demons to leave Dave alone and to enter into the minds of the swine—the first reference in the Bible to deviled ham! But what the demons didn't know is that pigs don't have the same measure of self-control that Dave had, so those hogs immediately went crazy and headed for the water. They did a perfect swine dive right into the deep water and were drowned. I guess the hogs went to hog heaven, but the main thing is the demons left poor Demonized Dave.

In the next scene, Dave is seen sitting, clothed and in his right mind, totally transformed from having been with Jesus. Instead of Demonized Dave he is now Delivered Dave; Delighted Dave; Determined Dave. Let's pick up the story in Mark 5:18-20: As Jesus was getting into the boat, the man who had been demon-possessed begged to go with him. Jesus did not let him, but said, “Go home to your family and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you.” So the man went away and began to tell in the Decapolis (ten cities) how much Jesus had done for him. And all the people were amazed.

Dave's community was a series of ten small towns spread around in what is now called modern Syria; it was called the Decapolis. Dave went back and connected with these ten cities with the good news of how Jesus had changed his life. That's what we need to be doing, too. God has placed each one of us in a special community and we have a responsibility to tell them about Jesus: We must connect with our community so they can be connected to God! If you have a desire to connect, there are three important things to know:

## **1. CONNECT TO THE RIGHT PEOPLE: YOUR RELATIONSHIPS**

Notice *where* Jesus told Delivered Dave to go; He wanted to go on the road with Jesus and his entourage, but the Lord had a much better idea. He told Dave to go home and tell what the Lord had done for him. The word “home” there can mean both his immediate family as well as his home community. In other words, Jesus knew Dave already had some relationships he could use to tell them about Jesus.

When I talk about connecting with our community I’m not talking about finding some stranger and asking them if they are going to heaven or hell. Jesus indicates in his statement to Delivered Dave that our first responsibility is to connect with the people with whom we already have relationships.

I didn’t attend Southwestern Seminary in Fort Worth, but most of our staff did. I received my Masters and Doctorate from Southern Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, so I never had the joy of knowing Oscar Thompson, one of the professors at Southwestern. Dr. Thompson taught Evangelism. He developed an evangelism strategy based on relationships using concentric circles. Oscar Thompson was diagnosed with cancer and continued to teach for four years. As the disease progressed he often had to be rolled to class in a wheelchair. On the Sunday after Christmas in 1980, God took Oscar home. After his death, his wife took his class notes and put it into a book called *Concentric Circles of Concern*.

The concept is simple. At the core of the circle is “self.” The first priority is to insure that you have a personal relationship with the Lord. Next, consider the members of your immediate family, the people who live in your home. Do all of them know the Lord? If not, you need to share Christ with them; after all, you already have a connection with them.

Next, what about the members of your extended family? Think about your grandparents, your in-laws, your uncles, aunts, and cousins. Do they all know the Lord? If not, you are the best person to share Christ with them.

Next, consider your circle of close friends. Does anyone come to your mind in that circle that needs to hear about the love of Christ? As you keep moving outward, what about your business associates, or classmates? Does someone come to your mind? Chances are you already have a connection, a relationship with them, so you could be the best person to share with them.

Then, what about your neighbors and acquaintances? Go down your street or through your apartment complex—is there someone there who needs the Lord? And you already have a connection with them. Finally, you move out to Person X. This may be someone you see, or someone you know about, but they don’t really fit any of the other categories.

Your responsibility is to simply *share* what God has done in your life. So make a list, and as you move outward from the center, consider whether these people know the Lord. If you have already shared the good news with the people in your inner circles, and they just haven’t chosen to trust the Lord, you’ve fulfilled your initial responsibility, but you should continue to show them the love of Christ. But you can focus on moving outward toward Person X.

God has called us as a church and as individuals to be involved in touching our community. That’s why I have a conviction that we should use all our resources to show the love of Christ to our community. God blessed us with one of the most beautiful church buildings in Texas, and we should be open to allowing our facilities to be used for community events. It’s not a temple, or a fortress, it’s a gathering place. Studies have shown that if unchurched people come to your church facility for any reason, they will be more likely to come there for a worship experience.

But more than inviting the community here, we must go to the community. We must increase the scope and effectiveness of our Multi-housing ministry. We must look for ways to network with other community organizations to help hurting people.

Jesus told Delivered Dave to go home and tell because He knew Dave already had a connection with those people—so do we! So, before we move any further out into the community, let’s be sure to start with our own family members.

## **2. CONNECT WITH THE RIGHT MESSAGE: YOUR PERSONAL STORY**

Jesus not only told Dave *where* to go, home, He told him *what* to say: Tell them what the Lord has done for you. There are several reasons why Christians don’t share their faith with others. First, there is fear. Some people are afraid they’ll be rejected or ridiculed if they share their faith. Another reason people don’t share their faith is because they don’t know what to say. They think because they don’t have seminary education they’ll say the wrong thing.

The best way to share your faith is to do what Jesus told Delivered Dave to do: Just tell people what Jesus has done for you. That’s called sharing your testimony, or simply sharing your personal story.

What do you think Dave did when he returned home? Did he say, “Have you ever heard of the four spiritual laws?” No. Did he ask people if they knew the three keys or the seven steps, or the nine principles? No. He said, “My life was a mess before I met Jesus. There seemed to be a thousand ugly voices inside my head suggesting that I do all kinds of terrible things. But one day, Jesus came to the lake shore where I was, and He changed my life. Since that time my life has been totally different. It’s as if I have a new outlook on life.”

If you are a follower of Jesus, you have a faith story also. It may not be as dramatic as Delivered Dave, or the Apostle Paul’s, but it is exciting to God, and it should be exciting to you. Every faith story has three simple parts: (1) What your life was like before you met Jesus. (2) How you came to know Christ; and (3) How your life is different since you met Christ.

One of the first thing participants in FAITH training learn is to write out your personal faith story so you can share it in less than 3 minutes. But even if you don’t attend FAITH, you have a faith story, and it is the very best tool God has given you to share your faith.

## **3. CONNECT FOR THE RIGHT REASONS:**

Jesus told Delivered Dave *where* to go - to his own home and community. He told him *what* to share - the great things Jesus has done for you. And in the last part of the passage we learn that Dave didn't just stop with his family members, but instead he told all the people in his home town. But he didn't just stop with his town, he went to the other nine villages until all ten cities had heard his faith story - and in verse 20 we read, “and they were all amazed.” That's what I call connecting with your community!

At this point you may be thinking, “Okay, Pastor, I know where Jesus said to go, and I know what He said to share, but WHY should I try to touch people in my circle of relationships? Let me give you just three reasons:

### **(1) Love**

Dave went back to tell his family and friends about Jesus because he had a burning love for Jesus. One reason we should connect with our community is out of love for what Jesus has done for us. Do you love your community? Good. Do you love your friends and neighbors? Good. Do you love America? Good. But the main love that will motivate you is love for Jesus.

There is a heaven and a hell—and there will be a final judgement. When the Apostle Paul was writing about *why* he was telling people to turn to Jesus, he mentioned two points of motivation in II Corinthians 5, “Since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade men...for Christ's love compels us.” (II Corinthians 5:11, 14) In light of the coming judgement, we should have a holy fear of God, and should try to persuade others to trust Him. But in the same section Paul also mentions that it is love that compels us. It is both the love Jesus has for us and the love we have for Jesus.

In John 21, we read a great story about Jesus and Peter. Jesus has been raised from the dead and He and the disciples are having a breakfast of campfire grilled fish on the shores of the Sea of Galilee. After they finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon, son of John, do you truly love me more than these?” “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.” Jesus said, “Feed my lambs.” (John 21:15) Now what did Jesus mean by “more than these?” Some think He was saying, “Peter, do you love me more than fishing?” Others think that Jesus meant, “Peter, do you still claim to love me more than these other disciples?” You'll recall a few nights earlier, at the last supper, Peter had bragged that the other disciples might forsake Jesus, but he never would. And then before the next morning Peter denied knowing Jesus three times!

Whatever the reason, Peter admitted he *did* love Jesus, then Jesus said, “Feed my lambs.” Jesus meant Peter was to provide spiritual food to people who needed to follow the Great Shepherd. Then Jesus asked the question two more times. “Peter, do you love me?” “Feed my sheep.” “Peter, do you love me?” “Take care of my sheep.”

Jesus never said, “Peter, do you love sheep?” He asked, “Peter do you love ME?” The reason we must connect with our community with the good news of Jesus is because we love Jesus. He is asking you the same question: “(Your name), do you love me?” “Then feed my sheep. Give them the nourishing food of my Word.”

## (2) Obedience

Jesus didn't just suggest Dave go tell his family, it was a command. Instead of getting upset that Jesus wouldn't let him tag along, Dave realized that Jesus had given him marching orders, so he simply obeyed the Lord.

In the same way, our Commander and Chief, the Lord Jesus has given us our marching orders. He has commanded us to go into all the world and make disciples. It is not a suggestion, it is a command. We are to be fishers of men, but like my article in today's newsletter, too many of us have been content to be keepers of the aquarium rather than fishers of men. If you aren't fishing—you aren't following.

The word “Lord” means “master” or “boss.” In Luke 6:46 Jesus said, “Why do you call me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I say?” What right to do we have to call Jesus our Lord if we aren't obeying Him in the area of sharing our faith with others?

## (3) Priority

Telling others about Jesus must be our top priority. How can we be content to go to heaven when there are thousands around us who haven't yet trusted Christ? It's as if we have been rescued from drowning and we're sitting in the lifeboat of salvation. While all around us the water is full of drowning people who are calling out for help. And while thousands around us are drowning, we are sitting on the life ring, having a merry time on our way to heaven.

Bringing the message of Jesus to people who need to repent is the priority of heaven, because Jesus said in Luke 15:7: Jesus said, “There's more joy in heaven over one sinner's rescued life than over ninety-nine good people in no need of rescue.” (Luke 15:7 *The Message*) Heaven doesn't get very excited when 5,000 of us gather here to worship and study the Word. But when *one* sinner repents and puts their trust in Jesus, heaven throws a party!

Leonard Ravenhill, a true prophet from the 20<sup>th</sup> century who spent his last few years out here in Lindale, Texas once wrote a poem that asks:

Could a sailor sit by idle if he heard the drowning cry?  
Could a doctor sit in comfort and just watch his patients die?  
Could a fireman stand aside, watch men burn and lend no hand?  
Can we sit at ease in church, with the world around us damned?

There is a community out there that needs to learn of the love of Jesus, and we must connect with them to show them the love of Jesus.

## CONCLUSION

Dr. Oscar Thompson, who wrote the book *Concentric Circles of Concerns*, was a pastor before he became a professor. In his book he writes about a teenage girl in his church named Brenda. She was vivacious and outgoing—a redhead with a sparkling personality. She came to see him

one day and as she started talking, Brenda started crying. She sobbed, "Brother, Oscar, I am so unhappy. Nobody loves me." She said, "I could die and nobody would even care." Instead of telling her that her parents loved her and that many of her friends loved her, Dr. Thompson decided to take another approach. He said, "Brenda, are you a Christian?" She said, "Brother Thompson, you know I am." He said, "Well, good, then you need to know that the Bible never says that you are supposed to be loved by anyone. Instead the Bible teaches that God created you to be a channel of love to flow to others. Your problem is you want the flow to go the wrong way. You are supposed to DO the loving. A person who always wants to have the stream of love flowing inward is going to become a stagnant pool. Brenda, I do believe you've become stagnant." Then he said, "Is there someone out there that you think would be really hard to love?" Brenda thought for a moment and said, "Judy." Dr. Thompson asked, "Who is Judy?" Brenda replied, "Judy is a freshman. She is just dumb. She rides the bus with me and she just bugs me. I have to ride the bus with her for forty-five minutes and all she does is chatter, chatter, chatter. I don't want to listen to her. She's a freshman, and I'm a senior."

Dr. Thompson said, "Brenda, assignment #1 is for you to love Judy. That is my prescription for your unhappiness." Brenda came back a week later and this was her story:

"I got on the bus Thursday morning. NO sooner than I sat down, here came Judy. She sat down beside me. It just really bugged me, but I said, 'Lord, I am going to show her love if it kills me.' The best thing I thought I could do was just listen. So I turned to her and for the first time looked at her while she was talking to me. As I looked at her, I began to see a little face I had never noticed before. I realized that underneath all that chatter was a hurting little girl. As we continued to talk, I asked, 'Judy, tell me about your family.' She became very still and quiet and was silent for a long time. Finally, she said, 'Brenda, my mom and dad are getting a divorce, and I am so scared. We are going to have to move and my whole world is falling apart.' At that moment I felt the love of God wanting to meet that little girl's need through me. I put my arm around her and we talked all the way to school. After getting off the bus, Judy put her arms around me and said, 'Oh, Brenda, I just love you.'"

Who do you know, who needs the love of God? Why don't you make a commitment to connect God's love to their need?

Is the Holy Spirit leading you to someone in your circle of relationships who needs to experience God's love? Is there someone in your personal community who needs a touch of loving kindness? What are you waiting for? Go make that connection with your community!

## OUTLINE

### 1. CONNECT TO THE RIGHT PEOPLE: YOUR RELATIONSHIPS



### 2. CONNECT WITH THE RIGHT MESSAGE: YOUR PERSONAL STORY

### 3. CONNECT FOR THE RIGHT REASONS:

#### (1) Love

“Since then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade men...for Christ’s love compels us.” *II Corinthians 5:11, 14*

#### (2) Obedience

Jesus said, “Why do you call me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I say?” *Luke 6:46*

#### (3) Priority

Jesus said, “There’s more joy in heaven over one sinner’s rescued life than over ninety-nine good people in no need of rescue.” *Luke 15:7*





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To put it in Texas terms, “You’re mighty welcome to use any and all of my ingredients; just make your own chili!”

For the Joy...  
Pastor David Dykes