

## How To Connect with People

Amos 3:3

Have you ever been in one of those conversations where you just were not connecting? You are doing everything you can to make sense and no matter how hard you try; you just can't seem to get through to that person. You may be talking to a teenager and it is as if you are talking to a spot on the wall. You may be talking to your husband or wife or an employee, but for one reason or another it just isn't connecting. One of the deepest needs you have in life is *the need to be understood*. We all desperately need to feel that *somebody understands us*; that *somebody can feel what we are feeling; can think what we are thinking*. We all need people who connect with us. If you don't have anybody in your life that *you feel connected to*, it has all kinds of negative effects.

A recent study found that if you are disconnected from other people, if there is no one in your life that you really feel understands you, you are two to three times more likely to die an early death, you are four times more likely to suffer from emotional burnout, you are five times more likely to suffer clinical depression and you are ten times more likely to be hospitalized for an emotional or mental disorder. Human relationships are good medicine. We need them. They are not just something that is nice to have in your life. You need them – physically, emotionally, and spiritually. You need people who *understand you, who relate to you and who can connect to you.*

Last week we talked in this series about the importance of being spiritually connected to a church family. But even if you are connected to a church family, *if you don't know how to connect to people, you can still feel detached, disconnected.*

Therefore, as we continue our series entitled “How to Live the Christian Life Today and Tomorrow,” we are going to talk about

how to connect with people. How to connect with them on the deepest level. This is one of life's most important skills. Learning how to really connect with people on a heart to heart, soul-to-soul, fellowship level. Unfortunately nobody ever teaches us how to do this. It certainly isn't taught in school *how to relate interpersonally.* You learn science and geography, history and math and a language in school. But nobody teaches you how to connect with people. If you do not know how to connect with people, you are not going very far in life.

So, today, I want to share with you some principles that will help you in getting connected with other people. Every one of you in this room needs this message. It doesn't matter what age or stage of life you are in. If you are a parent and you want to know how to better connect with your children, you can use these principles. If you are engaged or married and you want to know how to better relate to that other person, you can use these principles. If you are a teacher or an employer or employee, no matter who you are, if you need to get close to anybody in life, you need these principles.

We have a lot of material to cover, so let's get started.

First, be courageous and take the initiative. You have got to be willing to take the first step. You don't wait on somebody else to connect with you. This often takes courage. Why? Because *fear* often causes us to withdraw from reaching out. When we are filled with fear and anxiety we don't get close to each other. If we are *afraid* of being *rejected, manipulated, vulnerable, hurt, or used* we become *disconnected* in life.

Fear is as old as mankind. When Adam and Eve sinned and God came looking for Adam, Adam said, "I was afraid and I hid." People have been doing that ever since. We are afraid so we hide. We don't let people know who we really are. Why? Because we are afraid if people know what we are really like they will not like us. So we wear masks and we pretend.

**Where do you get the confidence, the courage, of taking the first step in connecting with someone, to go into a deeper level of intimacy?** 2 Timothy 1:7 says, “For the Holy Spirit, God’s gift, does not want you to be afraid of people but to be wise and strong [courageous] and to love them and enjoy being with them.” **How do you know when you’re filled with God’s Spirit?** You are more courageous in your relationships. You love people. **You are not afraid of them because God’s Spirit is in your life.** The Bible says in 1 John 4:8 that, “God is love,” 1 John 4:18 says, “There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love.” The Bible is clear, “God is love” and “love casts out fear.”

So the starting point in connecting with anybody is to pause and pray and say, “God, give me the courage to take the first step.”

**Second, be considerate of their needs.** In other words, if you want to connect with people, you have got to start with *their needs* not *your own*. The Bible puts it this way in Philippians 2:4, “Look out for one another’s interests not just your own.” **The problem is that everything in our culture from the moment you are born, teaches us to look out for #1.** Therefore, *being considerate* is something you have to learn to do. You naturally think about your needs, your desires, your goals, your ambitions, what you want in life. **And the result is we have millions of people disconnected because everybody is thinking of themselves and not being considerate of each other’s needs.** Colossians 3:13 says this, “You must make allowances for each other’s faults and forgive the person who offends you. Remember God forgave you so you must forgive others.” Part of being considerate of other people’s needs is making allowances for their faults. All of us make mistakes; so stop looking for perfection in the people around you!

**Three, be constructive with your words.** Use your words to build people up. Ephesians 4:29 gives us these instructions, “Do not let any

unwholesome talk come out of your mouths but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.” Notice the words “building others up.” **God has instructed us to use our words to build people up and not to tear them down.** God says that our conversations ought to be *positive* and not *negative*. Have you ever wondered how silent you would have to be if you never said anything negative about anyone else?

**One of the reasons we are not careful with our words is we don't realize how powerful our words really are.** Therefore, we say things without thinking. But people remember them. **Some of you still remember some of the things people have said to you in a thoughtless way as far back as grade school or college or when you first started working.** That is how powerful words are. **So God has instructed us to think before we speak.**

**Four, be honest about the problems in the relationship.** Ephesians 4:15 tells us to “speak the truth in love.” Proverbs 24:26 says, “An honest answer is the sign of a true friendship.” Notice that being *honest* and being *connected* go together. Genuine, healthy, deep, meaningful relationships are built on honesty not on flattery.

**All of us have blind spots in our lives.** The question that really matters is, do you have anybody in your life that loves you enough to say, “You need to work on this.” An honest and loving relationship is what all of us need in our life to grow. You can't grow without it.

**Now, my question to you is this – Are you mature enough to accept someone being honest with you?** The truth of the matter is that most of us would rather someone say nothing than to be honest with us about *some area* or *fault* in our life! **And when they do love us enough to be honest, we usually go off the deep end and blow our top with anger.**

**I can tell you today, there is no genuine, deep intimacy without honesty.** But remember, always “speak the truth in love.”

**Five, be confidential with information.** Why? Proverbs 11:13 reminds us that “A gossip betrays a confidence but a trustworthy man [or woman] keeps a secret.” **Are you the kind of person that can keep people’s confidences so that they can trust you?** We tend to think of gossip as one of those little sins, a misdemeanor sin. But when God talks about gossip, He puts it on the list with things like sexual immorality and murder? **Why?** Because it is so destructive to relationships. Gossip can tear a friendship apart, a family apart, or a church family apart. **More churches have been destroyed by gossip than persecution.** More friendships have been destroyed by gossip than any other kind of disloyalty. It is incredibly destructive to relationships when you trust someone and then find out you could not trust them.

**What is gossip?** Gossip is talking about a situation with somebody who is neither a part of the solution nor a part of the problem. And if we are honest with ourselves, we gossip to make ourselves feel a little more important at somebody else’s expense. **Whether they are true or not is not the issue here.** Gossip is simply taking someone else’s hurts and problems and using them to make us feel like we are a little bit morally superior to them. **And a friend who is a gossip is not friend at all, but is a two-faced hypocrite.**

**Some of you have been deeply hurt by gossip, true or not is not the issue; the hurt is still the same.** **What can you do?** Pray for that person’s healing that gossiped against you, that you can be released from the hurt that has come into your life.

**The final step is...be committed to the relationship.** Good relationships take time. They don’t happen by accident. **They take cultivation, work, and a lot of time to build a deep relationship with somebody.** That requires *commitment*.

I can tell you that in any relationship – marriage, family, friendship, whatever – there have been times that it would have been easier to have walked away than it was to stay. 54 years ago Linda and I ran away and got married (she was 16 and I was 23) and through the years our love has grown from what it was then to what it is today. But it did not just happen overnight. Why? Because good relationships take time. Today, my wife is my best friend, and I cannot imagine my life without her.

To be fully understood by somebody, and to have them fully accept you, and to have that kind of soul intimacy is such a rare thing in this world, and the satisfaction that comes from it, I cannot describe. It is not an accident. We have worked hard for our marriage. And we still work at it. Why? Because we are committed to making it better today than yesterday and better tomorrow than today!

And somewhere in this building there might be someone whose marriage is just hanging on by less than a thread. My advice to you is simply this: Don't give up yet! We have a miracle working God. And if you want to get beyond *shallow, superficial* relationships *you have got to be willing to stick with it.*

Let me say one more thing about friendship before I close. The Bible says this in Proverbs 17:17, “A friend loves at all times.” Notice the word “all.” That means even when it is inconvenient, even when you don't feel like it, even when they don't deserve it, even at personal cost. That's what real friendship is all about. When you are blowing it and you are making a mistake, friends are in your corner even when you are cornered. Friends are those folks *who see you through* when everybody else *thinks you're through.* Friends are those folks who walk in when everybody else walks out. They are there with you *even when you don't deserve it.*

The Bible says in Proverbs 18:24, “A man of many companions may come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.” What does that scripture mean, “A man of many companions may come to ruin”? It means that you can become so busy networking, so busy contacting, so busy socializing, so busy making acquaintances that you never spend the time and the energy and the effort it takes to cultivate the deep, satisfying intimacy of a good friend, or a good wife or a good husband. In other words, *it takes time to develop deep and lasting relationships.*

Ladies and gentlemen, we need each other and that is why God established the local fellowship of believers called the church – so we can be connected. This is the place where you can come to be fed spiritually, to be encouraged in your everyday living, and where you can find the faith and tools to keep on keeping on when it seems as if you have come to the end of your rope. Folks, please do not underestimate the importance of the church in your life.

If you are not saved, why not come today?

**Everyone please stand for prayer.**

Father,

Thank You that we don't have to go through life all alone. Thank You for establishing the Church. Thank You most of all for the connection that we have to You, Jesus Christ. In Jesus' name. Amen.