

INTRODUCTION

The internet has changed most of our lives over the past 10 years. The vast majority of you connect to the internet and employ email on a regular basis. Whether you use a dial-up connection or a broadband connection, you understand you can't send email or access the vast amount of information in cyberspace unless you are connected.

During the month of January, we're taking the concept of being connected and making a spiritual application for it. You cannot communicate with God or access His vast spiritual wisdom unless you are connected. So, I'm calling this series, “Get Connected!” Today we're talking about being “Connected to your Creator.” Next Sunday, the message will be on being “Connected through your church.” On January 18, we'll talk about being “Connected to your community.” Then on January 25, the emphasis will conclude as we consider being “Connected through your commitments.”

Your Sunday morning Bible Study classes will study the same themes each Sunday. These excellent Bible Studies have been written by our own age group ministers. In addition, next Sunday everyone will receive a “connected bracelet.” I'm asking you to wear this special bracelet for the next 40 days for several reasons. First, it will remind you to stay connected to God through a personal daily devotional time. Second, it will allow you to recognize other members of the Green Acres family and you can “connect” with them for fellowship. Third, when people ask you what the bracelet means, you can simply tell them it's a reminder that you are connected to God—and then you can share your testimony.

Today, we're talking about being connected to your Creator. Our text is found in I Timothy 2:1-6:

“I urge then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone - for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all men - the testimony given in its proper time.”

As we think about making connection with the Creator, let's notice three important truths:

I. TO ESTABLISH YOUR CONNECTION—TRUST JESUS ONLY

Do you remember Job from the Old Testament? Job suffered tremendous pain in his life, yet in the midst of his suffering, he never turned his back on God. Job realized God is so awesome and powerful that we can't relate to Him on our own. We're not in His league. Job understood we all need some kind of mediator to stand between us and God. In Job 9, he makes an amazing observation: “How can a mortal be righteous before God?...He is not a man like me that I might answer him, that we might confront each other in court. If only there were someone to arbitrate between us, to his hand upon us both.” (Job 9:1, 32-33)

The Hebrew word for “someone to arbitrate between us” is like our word “umpire.” An umpire is someone who settles differences between two teams. The Old Testament begs the question “Is there someone to mediate between a sinful person and a holy God? We need an Umpire!” The New Testament answers the question in the text we read in I Timothy 2:5, “For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all men...” Here are two of the most life changing truths you’ll ever learn:

(1) You can know the Creator! There is a God and you can know Him personally!

From the beginning of recorded human history, millions of individuals have gazed up into a star-filled sky and wondered “is there anybody out there?” When you consider the wonder and majesty of the universe, you are driven to conclude that Someone with a higher intelligence and a greater power than ours is responsible for all that exists. This Someone is God. The Bible has one verse to describe a person who doesn’t acknowledge that there is a God. Psalm 53:1 says, “The fool says in his heart, ‘There is no God.’”

The Hebrew language in that verse describes someone who says, “No God.” It’s like during the holiday season, after you’ve eaten a scrumptious meal, and then you’re offered dessert, you say, “No dessert.” You aren’t saying dessert doesn’t exist, you’re saying, “No dessert for me.” That’s the idea in Psalm 53. It’s a person who says, “No God for me.” It’s a personal choice.

At this point, you may be objecting and thinking, “But I believe in God!” Great! But believing there IS a God is only the first step. Some people think all you have to do to go to heaven is believe in God. James writes that even the demons believe in God and tremble—but will they be in heaven? Of course not!

There’s more that God desires of you than simply *believing* He exists. He wants you to know Him. In Michelangelo’s famous painting of the Creation, he portrays the hand of God reaching out to touch the finger of lifeless man. From the first time I saw this painting in the Sistine Chapel in the Vatican in 1974, I’ve been fascinated with the meaning. It pictures God reaching out to make a connection with us! God initiated a love relationship with the people He created. God has always desired to make a connection with each of the men, women, boys and girls He created.

In my last church, someone gave us a billboard on I-65 north of Birmingham. The first message we put on it was this picture with the simple message: LIFE BEGINS WITH JESUS. That’s the point! You can make contact with the Creator of the Universe! But there’s a condition:

(2) There is only one modem—JESUS!

When you connect with the internet you must have a modem. It may be a phone modem, a cable modem, DSL, or even a wireless network, but without some kind of modem, you can’t connect. While there are several choices of modems to connect to the internet, the Bible makes it clear there is only *one* modem to connect to God—Jesus. Paul wrote to Timothy that there is *only* one God, and *only* one mediator—Jesus Christ.

I’ve warned you before that in our post-modern culture it is no longer politically correct to insist there is only one way to heaven. In our age of “anything-goes tolerance” we hear that all religions are the same, and there are many pathways to God. Enlightened people say if you want to take the Muslim pathway to God, that’s okay; if you choose to take the Buddhist pathway, no problem; if you want to take the Mormon pathway, or the Hindu pathway, or the New Age do-it-yourself pathway: go for it! All these pathways will take you to God.

There’s only one thing wrong with that philosophy—it’s false. Other than that, it sounds pretty logical. But if you start with a false premise, then all your conclusions are wrong as well. If you start with the false premise that there are many pathways to God, then everything you surmise after that will be faulty. Of course, you have the freedom to believe whatever you choose, but please be advised the Bible never suggests that. The Bible doesn’t teach Jesus is *one* of the ways to God; it doesn’t even teach Jesus is the *best* way to God. The Bible unequivocally teaches there is only ONE way to heaven—Jesus! Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father but through me.” (John 14:6) How can you misunderstand that? The Book of Acts says, “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.” (Acts 4:12) Pretty clear, huh? And again, our text says, “There is one God one mediator between God and man, the Lord Jesus Christ.”

In order to be mediate between a holy God and sinful man, the arbitrator or umpire would have to be acceptable to both parties. Because Jesus was God in the flesh, co-existent and co-eternal with God from the beginning of the beginning, He qualified on the divine side. Because He was fully human, the man Jesus Christ qualified on the human side. And when He was hung on a cross suspended between heaven and earth, Jesus reached and down stirred among all the filth and sin of this world and grabbed the hand of sinful mankind. Then with His other hand He reached up and stirred among the angels and took the hand of a perfect, holy God. Then He brought the two together and said, “Tetelestai! It is finished.” And in that act on the cross, He reconciled the exalted Creator with His fallen creation.

So Jesus is not just one of the pathways to God, He claimed to be the ONLY way to connect. The renowned New Testament scholar R. C. Sproul wrote: “Moses could mediate on the law, Mohammed could brandish a sword, Buddha could give personal counsel, Confucius could offer wise sayings. But only Jesus offered to make an atonement for the sins of the world.”

II. TO ENHANCE YOUR CONNECTION—COMMUNICATE WITH JESUS DAILY

To establish your connection with God, you must trust Jesus only. Some of you are thinking, Amen, Pastor, that’s what I did years ago, when I trusted Jesus for salvation. Good for you! I established my connection with the Creator when I was nine years old, so I’ve been online for the past 41 years! But the tragedy of many Christians is they never do anything to enhance or improve that original connection. Once you are connected to God through Jesus, you must continually upgrade the connection. Oh, God isn’t changing, but as we grow older, *we* change and we should be continually improving our relationship with God. It’s called spiritual growth. Peter concludes his two letters with this powerful directive: “But grow in the grace of knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” (II Peter 3:18)

For most of you reading this message, you don't need to get connected, you need to *improve* your relationship with God. The best way to do that is by committing yourself to spend time alone with God every day. That's how you can upgrade your connection. There are two things you must do every day if you want to grow spiritually: You must study your Bible and pray. It's profoundly simple, but it's simply profound. Let's briefly consider each discipline:

(1) God speaks to us through the B.I.B.L.E.

I'm amazed by how many Christians report they have never received a message directly from God. What are you listening for? Are you waiting for an audible voice? Or are you looking for God to write a message across the sky in letters a hundred feet tall? Or perhaps you check your email every day to get a message from yahweh@heaven.com. Don't hold your breath. You need to know God speaks to His children through His written Word, the Bible. I've told you before that B.I.B.L.E. is an acrostic for Basic Instructions Before Leaving Earth. Your Creator has given you an Owners Manual, a User's guide, and it's called the Bible. But I'm amazed at how many people who claim to be followers of Jesus don't open the Bible every day, and some don't even bring a Bible to church with them. Now there may be some churches where you don't need your Bible, but at Green Acres, you need to bring your Bible every Sunday. Going to Bible Study and worship without your Bible is like arriving to play tennis without a racquet, or arriving at the first tee with you golf clubs.

You may be thinking. What do you mean, God speaks through the Bible? For many years I've tried to read a chapter from Psalms, and a chapter from Proverbs, and another chapter every morning. I remember the first time I was going to board an airliner after 9/11. I was a little scared, like everyone is these days. That morning, guess what I read? The next Psalm for me was the 27th Psalm that says, “The Lord is my light and my salvation—whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life—of whom shall I be afraid?” It was as if the God of the Universe was saying to me, “Don't be afraid.” And you know what, He was!

If you want 2004 to be the very best year of your life, my best advice to you is to make a commitment to read God's Word every single morning. It will enhance your connection. God speaks to us through His Word.

(2) We speak to God through prayer (knee-mail)

In addition to reading the Bible every morning, you should start every day in private prayer with the Lord. Mark 1:35 says, “Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.” Jesus had a special connection with God the Father—He was *one* with the Father, yet He recognized the importance of spending time alone with His Father in prayer in the morning. If Jesus needed that, we need it a thousand fold!

God really got my attention when I was a junior in high school in 1970. I read that verse from Mark 1:35 and realized if I was going to grow I need to pray every morning, but I found that sometimes I would wake up and forget. So I took two pieces of poster paper and used a broad-tipped magic marker and wrote the word “Pray!” on each poster. Then I took pins and pinned one on the ceiling right over my bed. In case I missed that one, I pinned the other one on the wall

beside my dresser. Maybe you should try that, or maybe the connected bracelet will serve as a reminder to you to pray and read the Bible every morning.

As much as you want to meet God for a daily time of personal fellowship, He wants it even more! God created you to have fellowship with Him. That’s why He made Adam and Eve. We read in Genesis that before Adam and Eve sinned, God would walk and talk with them in the cool of the evening. That’s the source for Austin Miles’ wonderful song, “In the Garden.” It says, “I come to the garden alone while the dew is still on the roses; and the voice I hear falling on my ear, the Son of God discloses. And He walks with me, And He talks with me, And He tells me I am His own, And the joy we share as we tarry there, None other has every known.”

I have some wonderful times of corporate worship and fellowship, but the sweetest times I’ve ever had with the Lord are when I have met Him alone in my quiet time. Is that what’s missing in your connection? Do you need an upgrade? Try spending time alone with God each morning. Here’s another suggestion.

III. TO ENJOY YOUR CONNECTION—ACKNOWLEDGE JESUS FULLY

Too many people in church are *enduring* a religion instead of *enjoying* a relationship with God. I heard a preacher say once that “most people have just enough religion to bug ‘em but not enough to bless them!” I’m not big on creeds, confessions, and catechisms, but I’ve read most of them. There is one part of the Westminster Catechism I like. If you have a Presbyterian background, you’ll recognize it. The first question is: “What is the chief and highest end of man?” The answer given is: “To glorify God and to fully enjoy Him forever.”

Let me ask you “Are you enjoying God?” I didn’t ask if you were enjoying yourself. If I met you in the hall this morning and asked you, “Did you enjoy worship?” I’m not inquiring whether you enjoyed yourself, did you enjoy God fully?

Here’s the key to enjoying God: Acknowledge Jesus is every area of your life. Go all out for Jesus, become a radical, sold-out, 24/7 follower of Jesus. The Bible says, “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.” (Proverbs 3:5-6)

The problem with many Christians is that they leave Jesus at church, and they never acknowledge Him among their friends or at their jobs. That’s a sure-fire formula for spiritual misery. For those of you who own businesses, would you be willing to acknowledge publicly that Jesus Christ is Lord of your business, and make Him the chief partner in your work? Would you be willing to invite Jesus into your social life?

Have you heard the FCC has now approved use of the F-word on network radio and television as long as it isn’t used in a sexual content? It’s just another example of how our culture is becoming more and more rotten. But as Christians, we shouldn’t just wring our hands and moan and say, “Ain’t it awful.” We are to be salt and light in a dark decaying culture. I’ll tell you what we need to do; we need to start using the J-word more. It’s politically correct to talk about God, or the

Lord, or the Good Lord, but to speak the word “Jesus” is becoming taboo. I think we should all commit ourselves to acknowledge Jesus is the right way at every opportunity we have.

I like all kinds of music. One of my favorite Christian groups used to be DC Talk. They had a rap lyric in one of their earlier songs that said, “Back in place; and I’m all up in your face; with a rhyme that I embrace; like a mother to her child; I’m kickin’ it Jesus style; to the ones that think they heard; I DID use the J-Word; Cause I ain’t too soft to say it; even if DJ’s don’t play it.” (“Jesus is Still Alright” DC Talk, *Free at Last*)

You can’t connect with Jesus without publicly acknowledging Him. In Mark 5, Jesus was on the way to heal the daughter of Jairus. He was engulfed in a mob of people. In the mob was a woman who suffered from a bleeding problem for twelve years. She slipped in behind Jesus and touched His cloak—she made a connection. Immediately she was healed. Jesus stopped and said, “Who touched me?” His disciples said, “Lord, everybody’s touching you—we’re in a mob!” Jesus said, “No, somebody really made a connection with me, and I felt power go out from me.” He kept asking until finally the woman acknowledged. “I touched you Jesus!” Jesus said, “Go in peace. Your faith has made you whole.” Do you need to touch Jesus today? There’s a mob of people here, and some will make connection and some won’t. If you do, be sure to acknowledge Jesus.

CONCLUSION

By this time you have almost survived another college football bowl season. Back in 1929, there was only one post-season bowl game—the Rose Bowl. On January 1, 1929, the University of California was playing Georgia Tech. The score was still 0-0 when Georgia Tech fumbled the ball. An offensive lineman for California, Roy Riegels scooped up the ball and started running toward the end zone 65 yards away, except that he got disoriented and he was running the wrong way.

In his own words, Roy described what happened, “I started in the right direction but made a complete horseshoe turn after going four or five yards when I saw two players coming at me from the right. In pivoting to get away, I completely lost my bearings. I wasn’t out of my head; I hadn’t been hurt. I just headed the wrong way.”

One of his defensives backs, Bennie Lom ran him down saying, “Roy, stop! You’re going the wrong way.” Finally, he grabbed him and stopped him on the one yard line. In that moment Roy realized his mistake and tried to reverse his direction and head toward the end zone 99 yards away. But by that time the Georgia Tech players had arrived and tackled him on the one yard line.

This was back during the time when teams often punted on any down to get out of trouble, so California elected to punt. Roy Riegels snapped the ball to the punter, but Georgia Tech blocked the punt out of the end zone for a safety. The score was 2-0. The final score was Georgia Tech 8, California 7. That finished a perfect 10-0 season for Tech and they were named national champs. Roy Riegels was marked for life, and was known as “Wrong-Way Riegels.” However, he was a resilient man, and he didn’t let it ruin his life. He could laugh about it. He went on to serve with distinction in the Army Air Corps in WWII, and was a successful business owner. In 1971, the

members of the 1928 Georgia Tech national championship team were honored, and they invited Roy Riegels. He accepted, and was named as an honorary member of the Georgia Tech Hall of Fame. When he accepted the award, Roy Riegels said, "Believe me, I feel that I earned this."

Here's a guy who was known as "Wrong Way Riegels" who didn't let his failures define him. Some of you have made some wrong decisions in your past. You've been heading in the wrong direction, too. Jesus said in Matthew 7:13, "Wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it." You may be heading in the wrong direction right now. But the good news is that you can turn around and start going in another direction. The Bible word for that is "repent." It literally means to "change directions." Jesus also said, "Small is the gate and narrow is road that leads to life, and only a few find it." (Matthew 7:14)

It doesn't matter what mistakes and failures may be in your past. God is interested in your future. Will you change directions today, and start moving toward Him? Remember, there is a God, and He loves you, and you *can* know Him personally. You *can* make a connection with your Creator through the Lord Jesus Christ!

OUTLINE

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If you borrow the majority of a message or outline, I encourage you to simply preface your remarks by saying something like: ***“Some (or “much” as the case may be) of the ideas I’m sharing in this message came from a message by Pastor David Dykes in Texas.”*** This simple citation may prevent any criticism that may be directed toward you.

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