

Fil-Am Community Church

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YOU'VE GOT TO GET CONNECTED

Hello everybody! Are you ready for God's Word? The world has never been more connected. No matter what happens in the world we hear about it now within seconds. Like the shark attacks in North Carolina. Did you hear about that? It was instant! Within seconds it was all over the internet, in Yahoo!, Facebook, CNN.com and what-have-you. Companies are laying billions of miles of fiber optics and shooting satellites into space. Then, you'll observe there's almost no place you can go where you can't find a kid texting on a cell phone. And adults talking on their phones while driving.

But in spite of the fact that the world is getting more and more connected I talk to people all the time who feel more and more disconnected. They're not in the flow. I think the mobility of life, the pace of life, our push toward self-fulfillment and individualism, all those things wreak havoc on our relationships. We aren't just connected to each other like we were perhaps 10, 20, or 30 years ago.

The Bible tells us very clearly that you were created for connections. In fact, the very first thing that God said was, "*It's not good for man to be alone.*" He had created Adam in a perfect environment and he's there and he's got everything. No problems at all. Yet God said, "No. Human beings are not made for isolation."

We were made for connection. Why? Because we were created in the image of God. The Bible says God is love and in order to love you've got to have somebody to love. There has to be loving relationships in your life. Whether you

ever marry or not is irrelevant. What matters is you need healthy connections, healthy relationships in your life.

We try to substitute all kinds of things for it. Making a lot of money. Having a good hobby. Career. Success. All these things. But nothing can take the place of connecting to God and connecting to each other.

Have you heard of the “Roseto Effect”? Roseto is a small town in Pennsylvania where a close-knit Italian-American community exists. It came under the scrutiny of medical researchers in the 1950’s and 60’s because they found out a phenomenon which simply befuddled them. In defiance of medical logic, Rosetans seemed nearly immune to one of the most common causes of death. They died of heart attacks at a rate only half of the rest of America. Doctors were mystified even though the men of the village smoked and drank wine freely. They spent their days in backbreaking, hazardous labor, working 200 feet down in nearby slate quarries. At home, the dinner tables each evening were laden with traditional Italian food, modified for local ingredients in ways that would drive a dietitian to despair. These poor immigrants couldn't afford to import cooking oil from their homeland and instead fried their sausages and browned their meatballs in lard. Yet, the resulting hefty bodies contained unusually healthy hearts. Why?

Their conclusion was that because the community was close-knit, neighborliness is good not just for the community but for the human body as well. In short, people are nourished by other people. This was confirmed by the fact that with the recent incursion of modern technology in that community, like the TV’s, the computers, the video toys and gadgets, and the internet, the people started to become less healthy. It looked like they interacted with each other less and less.

That’s what I want to talk about as we begin this new series. We’re calling it “Connect! What the Lord’s Prayer Means”. This morning, I’d like to share with

you that getting connected spiritually is like getting connected emotionally. You've got to connect. Not just with God but with other people.

The Bible says this in Romans 12:5 *“Even though we are many individuals [And we're all unique. Nobody's like anybody else.] Christ makes us one body. And individuals who are connected to each other.”*

I want you to turn to the person next to you and say, “Did you know we're connected?” But don't hold hands if that's not your spouse.

Life is all about connections. This morning, I just want to simply deal with what it means to be spiritually connected. This is kind of a little introduction before we dig in to all the details in the days and weeks ahead.

The Bible gives us four different metaphors in the New Testament about what it means to be spiritually connected. Word pictures that describe the church. We're going to look at these today. So what does it mean to get spiritually connected? It means four things.

1. To be spiritually connected means it's like being built into a building.

That's the first metaphor the Bible uses to kind of explain this concept for us. Ephesians 2:22 says, *“In Christ you are built together into a dwelling place for God.”*

Kuya Alex builds a building. He will tell you the most important thing about a building is this: the parts have to fit. If you have a beam that is a half-inch too short, sorry! It's worthless. If you have a pipe that is an inch too short, or too long, you can't use it. If you have a door that has the hinges on the wrong side or it is three quarters of an inch wider, it doesn't work. It only works if all the parts fit.

To be safe and to be stable in any building you have to connect things just right. This is really a metaphor for life. You are in a precarious position with your life until you get connected. Because unless you're connected the rogue winds are

going to blow you over and the emotional and financial earthquakes are going to undermine you. The rains are going to beat down on your roof and all these different things are going to happen. You've got to get connected.

Notice the Bible says it like this: *"You are a building that rests on the apostles and the prophets as its foundation, with Christ Jesus as the cornerstone. In him the whole structure is welded together [notice that] and it rises into a sacred temple in the Lord. And in him you are yourselves built into this to form a dwelling for God."*

So this first analogy, we're like a temple. God is building a spiritual temple and what makes it different, it's a living one and it's going to last forever and you've got to get connected to it.

Why did God choose to use a building as an illustration of what our relationship is supposed to be like? Because of this principle I just shared with you. That in a building the connected parts have to fit. They have to be connected or there's no support. Each holds up the other part.

If you're not spiritually connected, there's nobody there to hold you up. There's nobody there to walk with you when you get laid off, when you get cancer, when you hear somebody's walking out of your life, when you get the dreaded word on the phone that a loved has died or your grandchildren are seriously ill or whatever. You have to have that support. You were not meant to go through life unsupported. That's the idea of a building. You need physical support. You need emotional support. And you need spiritual support. And that's why we're going to do this series on why it's important to get connected.

If you're not connected, if you're not framed in, if you're not welded, if you're not attached, you're going to fall over.

2. The second thing the Bible compares spiritual connection to is it's like being joined into a body.

One of the most common descriptions of the church in the Bible is the body of Christ. We are the body of Christ. What Jesus Christ did when he was here in his physical body – walking around and doing all those things – he wants us to continue to do today. We are the body of Christ on the earth.

We are Christ's hands. We are Christ's feet, ears, eyes, mouth, nose, hands. We are his heart to the world today. The church is the body of Christ.

Everybody knows that in order to have a body it's all got to be connected. You can't have a disconnected hand or a disconnected toe, or a disconnected ear or anything like that. The Bible says *"In Christ's body we're all connected to each other."*

Notice also Romans 12 *"Just as there are many parts in our bodies, so it is with Christ's body. We are all parts of it and it takes every one of us to make it complete. For we each have different work to do. So we belong to each other, and each of us needs all the others."*

This is a very important verse. It says a couple of things about spiritual connection.

First it says that in the church we are all many different parts. God designed it that way. Some are the hands and some are the ears and some are the mouth and some are the feet and some are the heart. We're all different parts of the body. It's all unique and God intended that.

In fact God likes variety. Look around you! God really overdoses on variety. He could have made somebody who looked and thought and acted just like you in another part of the world and you wouldn't know it. But in all of history, all of the billions of people, he never made anybody like you. Even twins aren't the same.

When God created the insect beetles, he created over 500,000 varieties of beetles. You would have thought a hundred or two hundred would be enough. But

God overdoses on variety. So God doesn't want us to be like each other. Would anybody want to be like me? You'll be sorry.

Then Paul says the second thing about the body of Christ - everybody's needed.

We are all parts of it and he says it takes every one of us to make it complete. It's like a jigsaw puzzle. You build a jigsaw puzzle and you've got one part missing, what are you going to notice? The one part that's missing.

You say, "I'm just a toenail in the body of Christ." Have you ever lost a toenail? You notice it. Because if something heavy like a brick drops on your toenail and that toenail breaks, you're gonna be reminded for several months that you're missing that toenail. That toenail is tiny but you notice it.

So, never confuse prominence and significance. Something can be prominent but not significant. My nose is prominent. It just sticks out there. But it's not significant. I could lose my nose and keep on living the rest of my life happily ever after. It's prominent but it's not significant. But there's some stuff inside of me like a liver, a heart and lungs. They're not prominent but if I lost them, I'd die.

You may not be prominent in the body of Christ but you are significant. He says it all matters. Everybody's needed, we all have work to do. By the way, if all parts did the same thing it'd be pretty redundant. We all do different things. So, Paul says we belong to each other. We're not only connected to each other we belong to each other.

Paul warned about spiritually disconnected people. He says, "*They are not connected to Christ, the head of the body. But we are joined together in his body by his strong sinews and we grow only as we get our nourishment and strength from God.*" We only grow by being connected to Christ's body.

Here's the point, even more than growth, a disconnected body part dies. It dies. And he says you're not going to get your nourishment. So what I'm saying to

you is that this is absolutely essential. Not only do you need the body of Christ for support, like in a building.

But you need the body of Christ for growth and nourishment and life and if you're not connected to the body of Christ you're not going to grow. In fact you will spiritually shrivel up. That's why we're going to do a series on this.

3. A third metaphor of being spiritually connected is a vegetable or tree metaphor. It's like being attached to a vine. Like a grapevine.

It's interesting that Jesus, right before he goes to the cross, you figure whatever he's going to say to the people who are following him right before he goes to the cross is going to be most important. He says this in John 14, 15, 16. He's giving his last minute instructions to the people following him. Of all the things he could tell them here's what he says. *"Live in me and I will live in you. A branch cannot produce any fruit by itself. It has to stay attached to the vine. In the same way you cannot produce fruit unless you live in me."*

He's saying this is so important, not only do you need the support like in a building, and not only do you need the life blood like being in a body, he's saying you're not going to have any fruitfulness, any productivity in your life if you're out there on your own. You've got to stay connected. The Bible says, *"God's Spirit joins himself to our spirit to declare that we are God's children."*

You know, there's not an atheist in the world that can convince me that God isn't real. Because I talk to him. I just talked to him early this morning. I talk to him just like I'm talking to you. I've been a friend with Jesus Christ now for well over thirty years. Nothing could sway me from that. Why? Because I have a connection. It's not just about what the Bible says. It's not just about what happens in the church. I have a connection to Christ. That connection is so real.

I want you to have that kind of connection to God in 2015. It is the deepest prayer of my heart as your pastor and as somebody who loves you that you will have that connection that you go, “There’s no way I could not believe in God.

I’m connected to him all the time. And I talk to him and he speaks to me and I hear him.” Of course, not in an audible way.

In plants, a disconnected branch can’t bear fruit. You not only don’t have the support, you not only start to wither and die, but you don’t have any productivity in your life if you’re not spiritually connected. He says you’ve got to be connected to have fruit.

Some of you grow vegetables every spring. Like Nanay Monet. You know that if you cut a branch off, obviously, that branch isn’t going to produce any tomatoes or anything else. It’s got to be connected in order to produce fruit.

What kind of fruit? “*The fruit of the Spirit is this* [there are nine qualities] *love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.*” I don’t know about you but I’d like to have those nine things in my life. I’d like to be more loving. I’d like to be more joyful. I’d like to be more at peace no matter what happens to the economy. I’d like to be more kind to people who are mean to me. I want to be faithful. I want to keep my promises. I’d like to be gentle with people and have more self-control.

Here’s the point. The evidence that you are spiritually connected is you see those nine things in your life. If you are not seeing yourself grow in love and more joy and more peace and more patience and kindness and more self control and more all these things, guess what? It means you’re not spiritually connected. Because, he says, when you’re connected you’re going to bear fruit. And the mark that you’re not connected is you’re cut off. Somehow you got disconnected from God and you got disconnected from the body and you got disconnected from the plant. He says I’m the vine and you’re the branch. That’s what it’s all about.

Is there any fruit in your life? Some of you are fruit*cakes*. Some of you are fruit*loops*! Sometimes we're all a little tutti-frutti. But he's talking about this kind of spiritual fruit in your life.

Here's the fourth metaphor. And really this is just a set up for where we're going in the weeks ahead.

4. Being spiritually connected is like being born into a family.

That's the fourth metaphor. God says I want you to understand how important it is to be spiritually connected to a body, to a building, to a branch, and also to a family. This of course is my favorite description of the church because it doesn't need any explanation. We are God's family.

There are only two ways to get into a family. You can either be born into it or you can be adopted into it. Those are the two ways you get into a family.

In the Bible God does both for you. It's called being born again and it's called being adopted into the family of God. God does them both at the same time.

Notice this verse 1 Timothy 3:15 *"I want you to know how people who are members of God's family must live. [Then he tells us what that family is] God's family is the church."* We are the family of God. Church is not something you go to. Church is something you belong to. You're welded into the building of the temple of God. You're joined into the body of Christ. You're grafted into the vine. You're born again and adopted into the family of God. He's saying all these things. You're joined into the body of Christ. These are all connection models.

Most people think that Christianity is a belief system. There are beliefs that are involved but it's more than that. It's a belong system. It's belonging to the family of God.

Romans 15 *"You will all be joined together and you will give glory to God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Christ accepted you, so you should accept each other, which will bring glory to God."*

We've talked about this before. Acceptance and approval are not the same thing. God accepts me no matter what I do. He does not approve of everything I do.

Does that make sense? And the Bible says you are to accept everybody no matter what they do. It doesn't mean that you are to approve of everything they do. Big difference. The Bible says acceptance is love. Approval is not love. Acceptance is love because God's love isn't based on what you do. It's based on who he is. That's why the Bible tells us that we are to love everyone.

I am not allowed to hate anybody no matter what they do or who they are. But it doesn't mean I have to approve of everything that they do or I do either.

It's like being in a family. You don't approve of everything your sister did, did you? But I'll bet you loved her. Or your brother. Or your mother, or your son or whatever. It's like being born into a family.

I cannot fulfill God's purpose by myself. I cannot fulfill God's purpose for my life by myself. It is absolutely impossible because the number one thing God wants you to learn in life is how to love. Love him and love other people. That means you've got to be with other people. You can't do it on your own. You can't be a monastery monk or a guru up at the top of a mountain. You've got to be with other people. Because the most important thing is learning how to love. It's all about connections.

That's why in our church family, to be a member of Fil-Am Church, we ask people to sign a covenant. Those of you who are members of Fil-Am have signed the membership covenant. One of the things it says, "I promise to love the other people in my church family." You don't have to like them. But you've got to love them.

Some people are kind of hard to like. But you've got to love them. What is love? Love is an act of the will, not an emotion. Then, you'll find out as you act it out, the feelings follow.

Now, what does God want from us and why are we going to do this series on getting spiritually connected? Because of this next verse. *"I beg you brothers and sisters, to be completely joined together* [that means really connected. Not just to God but to each other.]"

Let me stop here for a second. Most people know John 3:16. They don't know 1 John 3:16. John 3:16 says, *"God so loved the world that he gave his only Son."* You know that verse. 1 John 3:16 says *"Because Christ gave himself for us we ought to give our lives for each other."* We forget that part. That's being connected to our brothers and sisters in the family of God.

"I beg you brothers and sisters... to be completely joined together by having the same kind of thinking and the same purpose."

Let me just ask you one question. Of all the places you could live God brought you here, God brought to this church family, do you think God wants you to stay disconnected? No. My question to you is this: will you join me in the rest of 2015 for your greatest year of spiritual growth? That's my question to you. Will you? Are you serious about making your life count? If you are, I will help you get there. If you're not serious, you really might want to consider going to one of the other fine churches. Because this is a church for people who are serious about connecting to God and connecting with each other.

What's the first step? The Bible says this *"First they gave themselves to the Lord; and then by God's will they gave themselves to us as well."* This is the starting point. First you give your life to Jesus and then you give your life to a group of believers. That's the connection process. So, if you want continue

growing in your spiritual journey, you say, “God, you’re going to be my Lord and this is going to be my church family”.