

Connection is Protection

Acts 2:42

The Life Together

“The culture is thick,” said Pastor Kevin York. It’s like trying to swim in Karo syrup - if you can imagine that. It’s not just *thick*, but it gets on you - and it begins to twist, mold, and shape you. When you’re brand new in Christ - you don’t know yet that *connection is protection* - that you need to be connected to a local body of believers - called the *Church* - the Greek word is *ekklēsia* (ek-klay-see’-ah) in the Scriptures, and it literally means *“the called-out ones”*, or *“the called-together ones”* - and we need that *ekklēsia* - that spiritual family, without which we are un-protected and dis-connected.

We then literally flounder and flail as brand-new Christians - babies in Christ - we can revert to the way we were before - default back to our own flesh. Even though our hearts were transformed, and we now hate that *old life* - now we have new tastes and new *everything* - but we no longer *fit* in that old world. We’ve now been completely changed and transformed - but *the culture is thick* - and it continues to conform us without the influence and protection of *ekklēsia*. The result is misery, if we just try to grit our teeth and try harder to live a good Christian life on our own. We *fail* - we’re in limbo - stuck in the middle between two worlds.

But, if we will cry out to God to save us and to help us, he sends a revelation of *ekklēsia*, where we feel a connection to something. What happens is amazing - believers who will walk with us and help us to grow - and we begin to experience a real *belonging* (the third tier of Maslow’s hierarchy of needs). We need connection. Something interesting also happens when we start attending church. We move past our own good intentions - where we failed, and felt guilty, ashamed, and strange in a whole different culture - because we acted more like *non*-Christians than we did *seasoned*-Christians - which is unbelievably difficult.

We don’t know what we don’t know, but the called-out ones - the *ekklēsia* - loves us in through connection. We then not only feel protected and covered, but we begin to grow, by looking and listening to what they are doing - *observing* - *mimicking* - and God gives us his grace to *learn*. He confirms his love to us, and we are not ashamed, embarrassed or humiliated, and we can experience explosive growth in our faith after we *know* that God loves us - and *actually likes* us!

The Power of Connection

Acts 2:41-42 The Message Bible

“That day about three thousand took him at his word, were baptized and were signed up. They committed themselves to the teaching of the apostles, the life together, the common meal, and the prayers.”

Who you surround yourself with is who you will become. Whoever you put around yourself in your life - the top five people you spend the most time with or around, will show who you *are*. We need to be around people - we need each *other*. In training for sports, you always want to be around people who are better than you are. Who you surround yourself with is who you will become. That begs the question, *“Who do I want to be five years from now?”*

We also need to surround ourselves with people who know more about *God* than we do, because they will elevate our walk with Christ. We surround ourselves, and we avail ourselves of people who have already walked the walk - and they're *doing it* - they're living it. We don't want to surround ourselves with people who are negative, judgemental, pessimistic, condemning, and who are unwilling to walk in obedience to the call of God on their own lives.

It's always easier to pull *down* someone who is up higher than it is to pull someone else up who might be lower *down*. Whoever you surround yourself with is going to have a pull on your *life* - because *culture is thick* - so are relationships - and whoever you're around - they're either going to *elevate* you - pull you up - or - they're going too pull you down. Whatever our age, we're influenced by peer pressure - we are still impacted by those who are around us - because culture is thick. So we surround ourselves with people who are already walking the talk - because *“connection is protection.”*

Acts 2:41 NIV

“Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.”

Thousands of people were gathered in Jerusalem. The disciples were also together in the upper room, and they experienced a miracle - the Presence of God, blowing into that place with a hundred and fifty disciples - the Holy Spirit descended upon them with such a noise - with such ferocity - that people outside heard it, saying *“What's going on?”*

The Holy Spirit had fallen on them, and *“tongues as of fire sat upon them”* (a representation of the very Fire and Presence of God) - landed on them, and they spoke with other languages - and all the Jews that had come from other nations actually heard everyone in their own native languages declaring the praises of God. That’s the *miracle* of languages. As that was happening, the Holy Spirit sat upon all of them, and birthed the Church - the *Ekklēsia* - in that moment.

Peter, who had denied Christ three times with a curse, now is the one who stands up and preaches the first Gospel message - the Good News of Jesus Christ, with thousands of people gathered there. Those who had received his message (perhaps 10 to 20 thousand total) were baptized and were added to the Church - they gave their hearts to Jesus and *devoted (to go back over and over again)* themselves to *“the apostles’ teaching, the life together, the common meal, and the prayers.”*

People were growing by leaps and bounds - they *believed* and knew that the Messiah had come - and then he died (for you and me) - and had then been raised from the dead and had released the Holy Spirit (which had been promised) upon them. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. They were doing works that were miraculous and *super-natural* - *beyond* nature. All of the believers were together and had everything in common.

Acts 2:41-47 The Message Bible

“That day about three thousand took him at his word, were baptized and were signed up. They committed themselves to the teaching of the apostles, the life together, the common meal, and the prayers. Everyone around was in awe-all those wonders and signs done through the apostles! And all the believers lived in a wonderful harmony, holding everything in common. They sold whatever they owned and pooled their resources so that each person’s need was met. They followed a daily discipline of worship in the Temple followed by meals at home, every meal a celebration, exuberant and joyful, as they praised God. People in general liked what they saw. Every day their number grew as God added those who were saved.”

The bottom-line is, *“I need you!”* Pastor Jeff said, *“I’m a better version of myself when I’m with God’s people.”* Something happens when we are in the presence of one another. We need each other - *in person*. We have Connect groups - the small groups ministry that allows us to get to know people in a different setting - and we’re better when we’re around God’s people - *our game is elevated*.

"I can't tell you how happy I am to learn that many members of your congregation are diligent in living out the Truth, exactly as commanded by the Father. But permit me a reminder, friends, and this is not a new commandment but simply a repetition of our original and basic charter: that we love each other. Love means following his commandments, and his unifying commandment is that you conduct your lives in love. This is the first thing you heard, and nothing has changed."

The first Scripture in the Shema (means "hear" in Hebrew) says, *"Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength."* (Deuteronomy 6:4-5 NKJV). Jesus said, *"And the second, like it, is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."* (Mark 12:31 NKJV).

We all need to be involved and connected, because in order to grow *larger*, we have to grow *smaller* - which means we need to *connect* - through the Connect Groups and Equip classes ...*Identity - Freedom - Connection*.

Prayer

Holy spirit, what do You want us to take away from this today? What do You want us to do about what we've heard? Lord Jesus, thank You for the privilege of connection. Give us Grace to grow and to become more connected to other believers - those who are on fire for You and are living the Life that we so want to live. Lord, we don't want to be like turkeys, but we want to soar like eagles. Thank You that we have a church full of "eagles" that want to help us fly and soar. So, Lord, we commit and consecrate our hearts to You, because we honor You and love You - and Lord, we want to be connected. We know that we're better when we're connected - we are better together. Holy Spirit we invite You to help us take a step toward connection - just a step - and then we can go out ...making beautiful messes wherever we go.