



the core

the **central truths** of the faith

Ephesians 4.14-16

Life as a follower of Jesus begins in connection, in meaningful relationships with others, not in isolation. That sounds strange in a culture that values individualism. It is downright scary for those of us that are introverts. An introvert's dream is actually to wash up on a deserted island, the sole-survivor of some freak incident. Connection with people is life-taking for introverts like me. We have to withdraw and recharge just to engage, even for a moment. You would think an extrovert would relish the idea of connection. "Connection!?! You better believe I will be there!" Even extroverts, when they really understand what Paul is saying about being connected, get a little unnerved. Paul isn't talking about casual conversations, a string of acquaintances at a party. He is talking about deep, intimate, on-going connection with fellow followers of Jesus. Connection, at least the kind that Paul is talking about, freaks a lot of us out.

Connection for an introvert, like me, is the stuff of nightmares. The idea of sitting around talking sends shivers down my spine. But, I am learning in the Kingdom of God, priorities—even those of our native culture—and personal preferences begin to be rearranged. There is no such thing as "me and Jesus," nor is there "me and Jesus and some casual acquaintances," at least not if we want to grow to experience life as it was meant to be. There is only "me, Jesus, and deep connections with others who follow Jesus." We need each other. Why is that so? Why is it so necessary for me to connect? Scripture reveals a great number of reasons. It is in connection that we experience what life in the image of God is meant to be (Genesis 1-2). It is in connection that we find support for life when it gets hard (Ecclesiastes 4.9-12). It is in connection that we actually experience God, hear His voice and feel His touch (Matthew 18.20 and 1 Peter 4.10-11). I am quite sure Paul knew all of these reasons, but he provides another one to add to the list. It is in connection, deep connection with fellow Christ followers, that we grow. To put it another way, maturity comes in and through our connection with one another.

Why is connection such an integral part to our growth as followers of Jesus? It is only in deep connection with one another that we learn to see ourselves and life as they truly are and are meant to be. If I am alone or only shallowly connected, I can float through life feeling pretty good about myself. I like to think of life like this as living in a house without a mirror. Without a mirror I never know when my hair is messed up or when I look absolutely stunning. But, if I have a mirror, then I can see how I truly look. People with whom we are connected work like a mirror for us. They show us who we are, really. They show us the good parts, and the bad. They speak truth to us. It is this truth, about ourselves, about life, and about God, that forces us out of our zones of comfort, stretching and growing us. Apart from their words, we would never grow. We have to be in deep connection to hear such words, or for people to even know what words to speak. Even as an introvert, I get this. So, every day I summon my courage, open the door and start connecting. I pray for the grace to be open, authentic, and real. I ask for the strength to speak and be spoken to. My growth, my life as it was meant to be depends on it.

A fellow traveler,

Blake
Spiritual Formation Pastor

My Next Step

We encourage you to consider doing the following as a way of handing off faith to your family. . .

- **Make room for community:** Just as individual people need connection, so too do families. This week evaluate the connection status of your family. With whom are you connected, really connected? Is there a family or individuals with whom your family shares time, meals, fun events? Is there a single person, an older couple, or even a younger family within Browncroft that you could begin opening your family's life to? Think about small ways to begin this relationship and of steps to grow your connection.

We encourage you to consider taking the following next step on your faith journey. . .

- **Find intimate community:** Life as God meant it to be is found in and through deep connection with others. We know we have deep connection with people when we know someone and are known so well, that no areas of our souls are hidden. We are completely exposed. It is this exposing of ourselves that we bring who we are into the light so that God might work on us through the loving words of those who see us most clearly. This week, consider beginning a relationship with one or two people with whom you can be in deep connection. We say one to two because as fragile beings, it is often not possible to be in this kind of relationship with more than one or two people at a time. Perhaps you might consider approaching someone with whom you would like to be in this kind of relationship and ask if they might pray about a similar commitment. If there is mutual agreement, you might begin meeting on a regular basis, first to talk and then to begin praying and seeking God together. You might consider reading *An Invitation to the Jesus Life* together as a way to get started. Whatever you do, make sure you spend plenty of time together, sharing, talking, laughing, and loving. It is in this relationship that you will foster the greatest spiritual growth in your life.