

Discovering Connection, Purpose and Hope – Part I

Introductions – Name, connection to any group, and please answer: What/where/how do you enjoy creation? Do you go there often? When might you go again?

Opening Prayer

Suggestions, some basic ground rules to remember in a small group

There is an art to listening. In a small group, we respect one another's opinions and listen carefully so the speaker feels heard.

There is an art to sharing in a small group. We take turns and try not to monopolize the conversation. Try to speak from the heart and share openly and honestly.

There is an art to NOT gossiping in a small group. When someone shares something raw, personal, or difficult, it stays in the group. If not, trust is quickly squandered.

Open It

- 1) The story of Grandpa walking through the snow (p7) with his grandchild reflects how our lives follow us around. What has followed you around over the years?
- 2) Where did you grow up? See p 12 - What principles for life did you learn as a child?
- 3) Why did these principles stick with you? Maybe they didn't; why? Where do your current principles for living come from?
- 4) What's a memory from childhood you'd rather forget? Why?

Background

God envisioned connection so important He sent a human into the world to demonstrate connectedness. We celebrate Christmas every year and embrace an image of God coming to earth as a defenseless baby. Connectedness takes focus as the story of Mary and Joseph unfolds, as recorded in the first chapter of Matthew. The writers encouraging words are, "*Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.*"²¹ *She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.*"²² *All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet.*"¹ These words are not only about God making himself flesh and blood to the world, but they also amplify God's desire to connect with us. God wants a personal relationship with us.

Family trees seem important when talking about Jesus, the Son of David, coming into the world to connect with humanity. The first chapter of Matthew begins with a genealogy.¹⁶ *and Jacob the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called the Messiah.*¹⁷ *So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations; and from David to the deportation to Babylon, fourteen generations; and from the deportation to Babylon to the Messiah, fourteen generations.*²

Explore It

- 1) If you know your family tree, how do you see or understand its influence on your life?
- 2) In chapter two, Hard Questions discusses parents and the community. Not all of us have grown up knowing our parents, but we have parental figures to whom we relate. Who have been critical parental figures in your life? Why?

¹ [The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version](#) (Mt 1:20–22). (1989). Thomas Nelson Publishers.

² [The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version](#) (Mt 1:16–17). (1989). Thomas Nelson Publishers.

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- 3) Describe those parental examples and explain how they influenced your life thus far?
- 4) Did you have siblings, and if so, what's your relationship with them now?
- 5) What does it mean to belong in a family, a church, a community, or a neighborhood?
- 6) What hard questions about belonging did you ask yourself as a youngster?

Going Deeper

p19 - Brené Brown talks about the importance of belonging as one navigates life. She says, "In 2010, in *The Gifts of Imperfection*, I defined belonging this way: Belonging is the innate human desire to be part of something larger than us. Because this yearning is so primal, we often try to acquire it by fitting in and seeking approval, which are hollow substitutes for belonging and often barriers to it. Because true belonging only happens when we present our authentic, imperfect selves to the world, our sense of belonging can never be greater than our level of self-acceptance."³

The Bible records that Jesus was asked one day, what is the greatest commandment of the law? He boiled it down by saying, love God with all your heart, soul, and mind, and love your neighbor as yourself. The writer of the book of John says in the fifteenth chapter: "*I've told you these things for a purpose: that my joy might be your joy, and your joy wholly mature. This is my command: Love one another the way I loved you. This is the very best way to love. Put your life on the line for your friends.*"⁴ This statement is the essence of connectedness.

Life Application

- 1) Do you/I follow this depth of connectedness in my/your life? Am I willing to put my life on the line for a friend?
- 2) How did you approach answering hard questions as a youngster? How has the process changed for you over time?
- 3) p20 – talks about rejection as an adolescent. What sort of rejection did you experience as a child?
- 4) Do you sense any rejection by people or groups as an adult? Is it similar to what you experienced as a child?
- 5) If your parents are still alive, what questions would you like to ask them now that you've not asked already?
- 6) What changes can you make to provide better connectedness with family, friends, church, and community going forward?

Wrap-up

What worked or didn't work this week?

How can we improve our discussion and sharing?

Next week Part II – Purposeful living leads to longer, healthier lives. –

Next time read the prologue and chaps 3, 6, 7, & 8

What's your purpose for living?

How did your purpose for living change over your lifetime?

³ Brené Brown, *Braving the Wilderness: The Quest for True Belonging and the Courage to Stand Alone*, New York, Random House Publishing, 2017, p 31-32

⁴ Peterson, E. H. (2005). [*The Message: the Bible in contemporary language*](#) (Jn 15:11–13). NavPress.