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Title: #beCHURCH: be Connected

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Text: [1 Corinthians 12:12-20](#)

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[Watch the service.](#)



We are in the second week of our #beChurch vision series, a series about engagement. It is a series about how our engagement in what God is doing in our lives, in this church, in the world, makes a difference. It makes a difference in your life and mine, it makes a difference in other's lives as well. It's a series about how we believe

that engagement in the love and grace of God as we know through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus changes everything. Throughout this series, we will look at some of the differences between church attendance and church engagement.

I like the point that church consultant and author Carey Nieuwhof makes: "Jesus never said attend me. He said follow me."

There was a study done several years ago at Harvard around the lifestyles of people and their health. They put two groups of people together and studied them over a long period. They discovered that people who had significant relationships and friendships in their lives, even with a poor diet lived longer on average than those with very healthy diets but few close relationships or friendships. They discovered that it is better to eat chocolate together than it is to eat broccoli alone.

The overarching bible text that we are using for this series is from the second chapter of Acts, which describes the characteristics of one of the earliest Christian communities.

"All who believed were together and had all things in common..." Acts 2:44
NRSV

The early church understood that one cannot be a Christian alone. All who believed were together.

We heard the way Paul would describe the church to a Christian community in the city of Corinth. Corinth was a wealthy place with many different things that can be distracting in life. Some of the same schedule challenges we might have today were present in Corinth. Making church and relationships with others could be a tough priority.

"For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.¹⁴Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many." 1 Corinthians 12:12-14 NRSV

You see, we need other people.

Brene Brown tells a true story about a village where all the women would gather down by the river in the village every day to wash clothes. As time went along, most of the homes in the village acquired washing machines, which meant the women no longer had to go down to the river and wash clothes. Shortly after, there was this sudden outbreak of depression in the village. No one could figure out why, until they discovered the cause of the depression was the washing machines. Once everyone got a washing machine, they stopped going down to the river to spend time together. The depression was caused by the absence of doing things together. The absence of connection, life-giving connection.

People come to church because they need God, we need to know the love and grace and Jesus. We come to church because we desire to experience a world that is bigger than ourselves. These things are true. I also believe that most also come to church to find meaningful connections, meaningful relationships, we come to church because we yearn to do things together. We know what Paul writes, that the body does not consist of one member, but many.

In March of 2020, when the COVID-19 pandemic started, many were relieved, even thankful that everything was going to be shut down for a bit. Our busy schedules, our rushing to get from one place to the next, our pulling through fast-food drive-ins for a quick meal in between practices and rehearsals and meetings, most if not all of it, came to a stop. For those first couple of weeks, while we lamented the global pandemic, we appreciated that life stopped spinning. We breathed, we rested, we baked bread...lots of bread. As life slowly picked back up, we realized that in that time when we are at home, we were also lonely, we were isolated. We learned what that village learned so long ago, that we missed doing things together. We needed a connection with others.

Now we are in this liminal space, where our schedules and calendars have picked back up, but we also have a new sense of what matters, of what is important. We have a sense of which connections matter, of the friendships and relationships that give us life. In a way, we are reevaluating everything. This time is a reset on our lives.

The church at Corinth was not going through a pandemic, but they were rethinking the way they lived together. As we approach the 12th chapter of 1 Corinthians, they were not a connected community. They were a divided community. Individual relationships were frayed, and they had lost a sense of close connection, connection rooted in the love and grace of Jesus. As followers of Jesus, they were stuck between the old way and a new way.

Paul uses the image of the body. It was an image that his hearers would be familiar with, as it was used by many writers in the Roman world to support the established Roman empire social hierarchy. The way it was typically used was to say that everybody or every group needed a head, and this would be provided by the wealthy, the elite, the ruling class. The image of the body was used to establish and clear and unquestioned hierarchy. Listen to how Paul uses the image.

"Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot would say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear would say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many members, yet one body... If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it." 1 Corinthians 12:15-20, 26 NRSV

In the Christian community, the way things are ordered is different. Paul rearranges the social order to where followers of Jesus share a mutual interdependence. There is no hierarchy, but a connected body

The connections we make with God and with other people are important. One of my great joys as a Pastor is seeing meaningful relationships made in the life of the church. The vision we have for the church is a connected church. The vision is to offer opportunities, whether it be Bible Studies, Small Groups, opportunities to serve, where we can connect with one another. The vision is to encourage each person at Geist Christian Church to

get involved in at least one ministry opportunity beyond worship. Our vision is for this to be a church where we can make life-giving, life-changing connections where God is at the center.

The story of Christopher McCandless is told in Jon Krakauer's book *Into the Wild*, which was later made into a movie. McCandless graduates from Emory University in Atlanta. He was a wealthy, privileged kid who decided upon graduation that he wants to leave everything behind. He gives all his possessions away, he signs his trust fund over to a charity and he sets out in his car, without telling his parents or friends or anyone, to drive from Atlanta to the wilderness of Alaska. He is going to go off the grid and live off the land. As the story progresses and he arrives in Alaska, he settles into an old, abandoned school bus out in the wilderness. The book and the movie take you through his life lived in isolation. I won't give away the ending, but at one moment as he is writing in his journal that he is keeping he writes this, *"happiness is only real when it is shared."*

Happiness is only real when it is shared. Joy is only real when it is shared. We cannot be a Christian alone and what a difference it makes when we have others to share life with. Certainly, people don't have to be in the church that we share life with, but what a difference it makes when we truly feel connected to people in the church. When we see Paul's writing lived out, if one member suffers, all suffer together. If one member rejoices, all rejoice together.

I believe that Christian community makes a difference. I believe that part, a big part of our mission is to be connected to each other. I believe the most important way to connect to God, is not that you are connected to me or any other pastor, but to be connected to one another. I believe it is important for everyone to find at least one beyond a worship service in the life of the church, so that we may be connected to others. So that we may be connected to God. So that's our challenge today. To find a way to be connected. And ultimately to be connected to the life-giving love of God as we know through the person of Jesus Christ.