

Circle of Faith – Week 4: Connect

Relationally Driven, Kingdom Focused

Over the last three weeks, we've laid the foundation of the **Circle of Faith**: exalting Jesus (**Upward**), creating freedom to ask for help without fear or shame (**Inward**), and stooping down to lift up the broken (**Outward**).

This week, we land on **Connect**.

Connecting is not a progressive step forward on a linear checklist, and it isn't a separate church program or department. **Connecting is a vital phase of the exact same living organism.** You cannot separate one part of the circle without killing the life of the whole.

Reaching out takes the ministry directly to the mission field. Lifting up takes the compassion of Jesus to pull people out of hopelessness. But **Connect** walks alongside them—introducing them to the miraculous and guiding them into a life of sustainable freedom.

- **Reaching out** goes to them.
- **Lifting up** invites them.
- **Connecting** walks alongside them.

Primary Scripture

Matthew 4:18–19

"And Jesus, walking by the Sea of Galilee, saw two brothers, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. Then He said to them, 'Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men.'"

Supporting Scriptures

John 15:5 | Proverbs 27:17 | Acts 2:42, 46–47 | Mark 3:14

The Methodology of Jesus: Relationally Driven Discipleship

Connecting means being relationally driven. Jesus didn't build an institutional pipeline or host weekly lectures; He made relationships and was motivated by creating close, personal bonds as the primary means of making disciples in the Kingdom of God.

When Jesus walked up to Peter and Andrew and said, *"Follow Me,"* He was employing the profound methodology of first-century Rabbinic discipleship:

- A Rabbi didn't just pass along information. A disciple (*talmid*) left everything to walk so closely behind their Master that they were literally covered in the dust of his feet.
- The goal was to observe how the Rabbi walked, spoke, prayed, and loved people until the disciple was completely transformed into his image.

- Jesus didn't invite people to simply believe a set of doctrines and then leave them to figure it out alone. He invited them to follow Him so He could reveal, release, and advance the Kingdom of Heaven through their lives.

He lays out this exact three-part Rabbinic methodology in Matthew 4:19:

1. **"Follow Me" (Upward):** Connecting with the Master as our highest priority.
2. **"I Will Make You" (Inward):** Letting Him shape, refine, and ground us through shared life and authentic community.
3. **"Fishers of Men" (Outward):** Being deployed to walk alongside others in the exact same way.

1. Upward: Connecting with Jesus (Our Highest Priority)

Connecting must begin vertically. Jesus is our highest priority, and our relationship with Him must be our healthiest relationship. Every horizontal bond we form stems directly from this single source.

- **The Vine and the Branches (John 15:5):** When we abide in Christ, carrying His heart for people isn't an exhausting religious chore we have to force—it is the natural overflow of His life flowing through us.
- **Walking in the Dust of the Rabbi:** We stay close enough to Jesus to catch His posture, His urgency, and His burden for the lost. When our upward connection is vibrant, we stop seeing people through human eyes and start seeing them through the eyes of the Shepherd.

2. Inward: Connecting with the Body (Intentional Fellowship)

Before we can effectively care for the world, the church body must connect deeply within itself. We have fellowship with other believers, building healthy friendships and accountability within the family of God without ever excluding others in the process.

- **Iron Sharpening Iron (Proverbs 27:17):** Real fellowship goes far beyond polite Sunday morning greetings. It means cultivating intentional relationships, trusted friends, prayer partners, and accountability, who sharpen our faith and keep us standing firm.
- **Radical Fellowship Without Exclusion (Acts 2:42, 46–47):** Like the early church, we break bread with gladness and simplicity of heart. We build a healthy, united family that supports one another while keeping our hearts and doors wide open to anyone looking for a home.

3. Outward: Connecting to Those We Minister To (Walking Beside)

We build relationships with those we've reached out to and lifted up, helping them know Jesus personally and integrating them into the church family.

- **Relational, Not Transactional (Mark 3:14):** Jesus appointed the twelve *"that they might be with Him."* Discipleship doesn't happen in a sterile classroom; it happens in real-time—sharing meals, opening our lives, and walking through daily decisions together.
- **Walking Beside Them into Freedom:** Reaching out goes to them; lifting up invites them; connecting walks beside them step-by-step as they experience the miraculous and step into a life of complete freedom.
- **Winning, Equipping, and Deploying:** We don't connect with people to make them dependent on a pastor or a building. We connect with them to:
 1. **Win them** through uncompromised, loving relationship.
 2. **Equip them** by walking with them as they grow in faith and identity.
 3. **Deploy them** so they can turn right around and Reach Out, Lift Up, and Connect with the next soul.

The Calling & Preacher's Charge

"Church, connecting is where our faith gets traction. God is not calling us to sit on the sidelines as passive spectators. He is enlisting us into His living work. Look around you. The harvest is plentiful and urgent. Reaching out goes to them, lifting up invites them, but connecting walks beside them until they are standing on their own two feet in freedom. Let's stop looking at where we've been and start stepping into what God is doing right now."

Why This Matters Right Now: A Call to Arms Before the Altar

There was a 15-year-old boy who took his life in Dover, just a few miles from our church. Suicide rates all over Ohio are rising, hitting youth as young as age 10.

It is the second and third leading cause of death in preteens, teens, and young adults. It is high in elderly folks, and in 45-to-54-year-olds, especially males, where it is over three times higher in men than women.

There are many other people out there who are hopeless, overwhelmed, oppressed, addicted, and searching for answers. Meanwhile, the church is trying to figure out how to be relevant to the modern culture while retaining its heritage.

The Gospel has never been needed more than it is right now in America. Winfield Church is not immune to these problems. It has come to our backyard. The enemy is ramping up his tactics to cause the hurting to lose hope, feel unloved, seem left out, and feel like the world can exist better without them.

We need a burden to say, **"Not on my watch!"**

We need to stop looking inwardly to the point that we can no longer see outwardly. There are a lot of people looking for answers, and we cannot selfishly be silent. We cannot afford to sit idly by thinking we are unable to step into the darkness and intercede for people. It is time we reach out, lift up, and connect with people to pull them out of the grip of the enemy and the darkness encompassing their lives. If we don't or we won't, then who will?

The enemy is ramping up warfare for the fall solstice. The enemy loves nothing more than human sacrifice, especially through suicide. It is time to pray more fervently, more regularly, and more intentionally. It is time to ask Jesus to make us sensitive to the nudge of the Holy Spirit. It is time we tell the devil enough is enough. He has made war. It is time we learn to fight back.

This is what this series is really about. We learn how to wage war on the enemy by living by the Kingdom lifecycle of faith. We have received from Jesus. What will we do with what we have been given?

Closing Prayer

"Lord Jesus, for whatever our part is in being passive against the attacks of the enemy, forgive us. Give us boldness to speak against the darkness and to proclaim Your word in the face of the enemy.

Let us be sensitive to Your nudge to help those who need it around us in our everyday lives. Let us never turn a blind eye or a deaf ear to the cries of our community for healing, hope, deliverance, truth, and salvation.

May we carry Your love, truth, grace, and mercy in abundance to those You lead us to. Let us fearlessly declare Your word wherever we go and glorify You in all we do and say.

We take authority over the enemy who has encamped our region and cloaked it in darkness. We rebuke the enemy in the name of Jesus Christ.

Let Your light shine brightly to expel the darkness from our midst. Send revival like has never been seen before. Move our hearts with what moves Yours.

Take Your rightful place here in our region. We thank You and praise You for all these things, in Jesus' name. Amen"