



Get Connected!

Week #5

Last week as we focused on prayer, it was suggested that each member of the group spend 5 minutes in silence each day.

Group Sharing:

Share with the group your experience of silence:

- Describe your experience.
- What feelings did you have?
- What was helpful?
- What was difficult?

Service: In the model for how our church helps people connect with the heart of God, we said, “In service we help others to be connected to the heart of God.”

Go into All the World!

In John 17, Jesus prays, “In the same way that you gave me a mission in the world, I give them a mission in the world.”

(John 17:18, The Message)

Jesus says, “God authorized and commanded me to commission you: Go out and train everyone you meet, far and near, in this way of life,…” (Matthew 28:18-19a, The Message)

This passage, called “The Great Commission”, is repeated in various words in all four gospels and in the book of Acts*. Jesus intends that we will go to others with the good news.

Paul names our mission in these words: “...God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the ministry of reconciliation.” (II Corinthians 5:19)

Wow! God has entrusted us with the responsibility to help others be connected with the heart of God. This is the service to which we have been called.

*(Matthew 28:19-20, Mark 16:15, Luke 24:47, John 17:18 and Acts 1:8)

Group Discussion: Before we discuss how to help others be connected with the heart of God, it will be helpful to think about who helped each of us. Who influenced your decision to follow Jesus? How did he/she/they influence you?

Martha Grace Reese tells stories of people helping others come to God. Here are two:

“I became involved in church again for the first time since childhood. My life was so fun and so full. I was taking care of the twins, running them around to their activities, doing my job, keeping house. I went along like that for years. Then Ed had this affair that broke my heart. No, not just my heart. It broke my life. And my neighbor Sandy was incredible. She listened and listened. She helped me pay bills and cook when I couldn’t even function. She prayed for me. I’d prayed before, but this was different. I felt as if there really was a Jesus and he was standing right there with his arm around my shoulders. I mean it was really Sandy’s arm, but it felt like Jesus’. That was the start.”

From Unbinding Your Heart by Martha Grace Reese, p.69

A Church treasurer, a normal, quiet CPA named Brian, told me, “It’s hard for me to be outgoing or really friendly like some people, so what I do is to pray that God will show me people to pray for who might be open to Christ now. When I ask, God brings people to my mind, or into my life, whose kids left for college a couple months before. Sometimes it’s someone who just retired, or a lady whose husband just died, or someone who lost his job. When their names come into my mind, I call them for lunch or golf and then I ask them if they want to come to church. I don’t talk about a lot of stuff, but I invite them.”

“I asked Brian what has happened with the people he has invited to church. He said, “Well, a lot of them have come to church and a large percentage of them have joined. I really never have been able to tell them about the Lord or lead them to Christ or through the steps of salvation or all that, I just tell them church means a lot to me and helps me. I guess my job’s just the praying and the inviting.”

From Unbinding Your Heart by Martha Grace Reese, p.66

Group Sharing: What do these two stories suggest about how you might help others come to God?

Below are two excerpts from the “Future Story”. As you read about Joe relating his experiences to the church, note who helps others and how they help another know or experience God.

Excerpt one:

“It was Marilyn’s parting words that stuck with me: “I hope you sense God in our worship and community today.” It was a different attitude and concern than I remembered from other churches I had attended in the past. These were people seeking God; alert to God’s presence all around them.” It was like I was being invited to travel with these people to a destination I didn’t know yet.”

By the time worship was over, I felt immersed in a joyful spirit of praise to God. I recognized people with concerns not so different than my own, and I had been personally challenged that my life could still count for something.”

Excerpt two:

“Well I started with a few games of basketball after school with Chris and his King’s Kid’s gang. Then came spring and we needed to get outside. Soccer is my thing and gave me a chance to break off the rust and show these kids what American football should be. Our games got bigger and bigger, and we decided to move to the Swan pond field for more room. We definitely picked up a few extra kids from the apartment complex, and now Amanda was helping out too. I still smile when I think of the beaming face of Justin when he came to Amanda and me. The way we included him, seemed to help him get it for the first time, that God’s love was meant for him too.”

Group Sharing: As you reflect on these stories, name the ways you observe people helping others to experience God?

Here at First Baptist Church

What are some of the ways through First Baptist we seek to help others come near to God? Here are a few thoughts:

- We encourage each other to communicate our experience of the grace and compassion of God in our daily interactions and contacts with people.
- We create a hospitable environment where those who visit or are new to our church, experience welcome and a place to engage others in God-aware conversations.
- As a church, we sponsor ministries of outreach such as King’s Kids and Playschool. As we see need or opportunity we can initiate new programs.
- Our Mission Board selects several groups or organizations in our community and around the world to which we give money so they can fulfill their God-given purpose. As individuals we can volunteer to work with these groups to help fulfill their mission.

(continued)

- The Nehemiah Team discussed the idea of a “launch pad” for mission. Individuals may see a

need or feel called to a particular outreach. Some examples at FBC might be: Wheels for the World, Operation Christmas Child, Shoes for Haiti. All started by individuals who saw the need. Can we encourage, support and give place to an individual who is called to launch a mission?

Here is a challenge for the coming week. Do one or more of the following activities and be ready to report on

Group Sharing: Add to this list of ways we at FBC help others to come near to God.

- What ones do you think we do effectively?
- How could we become more effective?

Group Sharing: Reflecting on the stories and our conversations throughout this session:

- Identify the forms of service/outreach that draw you?
- What is your role in helping others to relate to God?
- How does or could our church empower, strengthen or support you?

it next week:

1. Take time each day this week to reflect on your interactions during the previous day. Record times when you feel you may have encouraged another to be in a God relationship.
2. In your praying time, ask God to help you sense the need of another person not in our church. Decide what action God is asking you to take in relation to that need.
3. We best serve when we listen and understand. To help understand the views of someone not actively practicing the Christian life, conduct an interview.
(See an outline on the next pages.)

Further resources: Unbinding Your Heart, 40 Days of Prayer and Faith Sharing, by Martha Grace Reese, copyright 2008 by Gracenet, Inc. Also check www.GraceNet.info

Close the group with prayer. Pray for each other in your group. Also pray for:

- our church,
- the other groups that are meeting
- our worship together and
- our opportunities to help others come near to God.

Interview a person with no church background:

From: Unbinding Your Heart, by Martha Grace Reese, Chapter 5 “What New Members Want – Transformed Lives”

Interview either a person who used to go to church but doesn't attend now, OR someone with no church background at all? Look for people in your relationship circles, neighbors, co-workers, places you do business, etc. Keep in mind that you're doing an interview to find out their opinions, so they'll probably be flattered to be asked and listened to, not threatened!

Explain that you and some of your friends in your church are trying to figure out ways to help your church be even more open to new people. Tell them that you have been a Christian for so long and love your church so much, you don't have a good perspective on it anymore. Let them know that you have decided to do interviews with people who aren't in the middle of things at church so that you can get a better perspective.

Over lunch or coffee, ask the following questions. LISTEN until they stop talking! Take notes. Ask follow-up questions if it seems appropriate. Don't give advice or give answers. Just get their opinions. Try to hear not only what they say, but how they say it. Listen for what they don't say.

Some questions you might ask:

1. What pops into your mind when you hear the word church?

2. Has anyone ever invited you to their church? What did you think when they asked you? Did you go? How did it feel? If you didn't go, why not?
3. Have you ever had a sense of God or Jesus communicating with you? What was it like?
4. If you had one question you could ask God and knew you'd get an answer, what would it be?
5. Would you like prayer for anything? (You may pray there, if it's private and they're comfortable with that, or tell them you'll be praying for them during your prayer times. If they have asked for prayer, call them back in a week or so. Ask how the situation's going and if there's any different way you could focus your prayer for them. You may be the only person praying for them.)