

TALKING POINTS

NEXT LEVEL - FOUR PILLARS OF CONNECTION

LEARNING IN

To Go to the next level in your relationship to God, it's all about *connection* - to God and to each other.

We begin by understanding this key premise - the church is not about just gathering a crowd, but building a community. When we come together as a community of believers to act, God moves in us and through us in significant ways. The key relationship, the key connection we must have is with God *first*. The beauty of this relationship is it was initiated by God - not us!

As believers in Jesus, what separates us out from the world is how we act toward each other as believers, and towards all others as our neighbors in the world. Our relationship with God must always be reflected in our relationship with others. This is how we show the world the reality of Jesus in our lives.

Read Colossians 3:12-14

What would be a concrete thing you can do to build unity with other believers? With those who don't believe?

LIVING IT OUT

Whether we are connecting to God or connecting to each other, the book of Colossians tells us there are four pillars of connection. These pillars represent how God has dealt with us and how we are to deal with each other:

Tender Hearted Mercy - when God deals with us, He shows us mercy, which means He *withholds* His judgement. When we deal with a difficult brother or sister, we are to remind ourselves *this is a person for whom Christ died*.

Read Ephesians 4:31-32, 1 Peter 3:8-9

Why is there an emphasis on mercy being *tender-hearted*?

Respect - the definition of respect is the due regard for the feelings, wishes, rights, or traditions of others. Kindness + humility + gentleness, + patience = respect.

Read Philippians 2:3-4

How do you show respect to someone you disagree with or offends you?

Forgiveness - does *not* mean a person's wrong actions are approved, forgotten, or didn't take place. It *does* mean we start viewing this person through the eyes of the cross, making a conscious, deliberate decision to release feelings of resentment or vengeance.

Read Matthew 18:21-22, Luke 23:34

How can you forgive without forgetting or excusing away bad behavior?

Love - the very *essence* of God is love. A love which speaks of a completely undeserved kindness and generosity done by one who is in a position of power. Unlike us, God is not fickle, undependable or self-serving. Instead he is faithful, true, upright, and generous—always. We show where we *really* stand in our walk with God by *how we love*.

Read 1 John 4:7-12, 16 1 Corinthians 13:1-3

Is it possible to act in a "loving" or "spiritual" way, but not *really* love? If so, how do we deal with it in ourselves?