

Connect: Pathways that Lead to Connection

“Remain in Me, and I in you.” (John 15:4, CSB)

“I feel disconnected.”

Have you heard or felt that statement recently? In society and the church, we are all experiencing some degree of separation. There has never been a more urgent time to re-establish real *connection*.

We need a fresh connection with our Creator through renewal and worship. Our relationship with God should be pursued with passion. Those within the fellowship of a local church must find a way to reconnect in small groups. Encouragement and accountability that originates from fellowship with other believers is critical to our growth as followers of Christ. Certainly, the Body of Christ must connect the Good News to those who are lost and without our Lord Jesus Christ.

We at the State Board of Missions believe that the *Connect* process could be a catalyst for renewal or greater spiritual health in the life of a local church.

There are no silver bullets in church revitalization. What you will see are biblical principles that lead to authentic *connection*. Our prayer is that the Lord will use *Connect* as a biblical process for moving the church through and beyond the NEW REALITY.

(Scriptures to consider: Proverbs 3:5-6, Matthew 7:14, Psalm 84:1-10, John 14:3-6)

1. Connect with the Creator: Renewal and Worship

Renewal

Scriptures: Psalm 119:105, Malachi 3:7, Psalm 23:1, Matthew 11:28, Philippians 3:10, Revelation 2:4-5

Markers: To experience the undeniable presence and power of God working in and through the church. To reflect a love for God and obedience to His Word.

Steps:

- Process through the emotions like you would through the grief cycle. Pastoral renewal.
- Pursue the Lord with all your heart.
- Use a renewal tool. Purpose of the tool is renewal, not to complete a workbook. Be deliberate.
- Special prayer emphasis.

Guides: Thom Rainer has a simple chapter on prayer in *Anatomy of a Revived Church*. Lead members to target prayer toward the process/elements of *Connect: Pathways That Lead to Connection*. An excellent new tool for renewal is *Return to Me* by Claude King – personal and church renewal. Another book to consider by Claude King is *Come to the Lord's Table*. These books will be especially helpful to pastors: *Liberating Ministry from the Success Syndrome* by Kent and Barbara Hughes, *The Emotionally Healthy Leader* and *The Emotionally Healthy Church* by Peter Scazzero. *Forty Days of Seeking God* by Gregory Reed Frizzell. Also, here's a good online resource: [Factsandtrends.net/category/pastors](https://factsandtrends.net/category/pastors).

Implementors: Person(s) of Prayer to lead prayer emphasis or coordinate prayer times. Someone to lead study or guide church/small groups through *Return to Me* or some other type of Renewal series.

Worship

Scriptures: John 4:23-24, Romans 12:1-2, James 2:14-26, Psalm 16:11

Markers: Authentic worship within the church that overflows into the community. To know Christ and the power of His resurrection.

Steps:

- Plan and implement worship relevant to today. Sing songs and preach messages that speak truth and encourage missional living.
- Use testimonial videos that illustrate how church members minister and reach out beyond the walls of the church.

- Highlight members' stories of pathways to connecting and gospel conversations spoken.
- Preach messages that relate effectively to where individuals are presently – anxious, fearful, depressed, absorbed in world events, etc. Answer questions about the purpose of the church. Preach from the Psalms and Acts, noting that the early church had their own set of challenges and lived under persecution.
- Consider ideas from *Healthy Church Worship* presentation by Mike Harland (see pages 4-5 of this documents).

Guides: *Worship Essentials*, by Mike Harland (B&H Publishing), *Sing!* by Keith and Kristyn Getty (B&H Publishing). Some additional great ideas can be found at resourcingworship.com. Get sermon ideas by connecting with other pastors about message series and share thoughts on improving worship.

Implementers: Pastor, worship leader, worship team

Healthy Church Worship

Summary paper by Ken Allen, based on an audio presentation by Mike Harland, associate pastor of worship, First Baptist Church, Jackson, Miss.; former director, Lifeway Worship.

Link to the full audio presentation:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1I37DzjxBMSM0PIKzq4FOWOSISngNzHST/view?fbclid=IwAR2DcYitDDfjFYl1FgO-8sIzue4z2N7isGs-lHQOTQ-rZ8Q2lVrqiQK-a8c>

What is Jesus' plan? We need to seek him. What are we experiencing on Sunday mornings? Most of it is powerless and routine.

True worship equals changed lives: "Here am I. Send me!"

Real worship leads to evangelism and missions.

What is it about our worship service that seems like it's no big deal if I miss it? Really think through that.

Get away from the idea of superficial changes.

3 Things That Will Transform Worship:

1. Plan your worship for the people who are in attendance.

Do not plan it as attractional. Lead them into worship – the people who are there.

Yes, people need to let go of traditions, but they first need to fall in love with Jesus again. It's not about the songs.

The goal is for people to have heartfelt singing to God. Simple for older folks. Each Sunday sing one a cappella. Simple.

2. Pray with intentionality on Sunday mornings.

Record the whole service and listen to the prayers. See how similar they are. All across the SBC we can hear same type of prayer. Be intentional about public prayer. Pastor, encourage your people in prayer, that the presence of the Risen Savior is among us.

Frequency. Opening. Pray for another church or local pastor. Missions. Ears to hear. Gospel to be heard. Someone to pray for the pastor. Have a young person pray that is serious.

3. Make scripture reading important.

NT and OT. Responsive or in unison. They can read from the pew with a microphone.

Get out of routine and redundancy. Less is more. Then add to it. Find people to read who really pray.

Get people to sing about Jesus.

A Couple of Things to Stop:

1. Stop singing songs with bad theology.

Sing the ones with amazing theology, songs that really elevate our sinful condition and the great God we serve. Sing about salvation and about our hope in the gospel. Do not just sing songs you like.

2. Quit saying stuff that does not matter in the worship service.

Like “How many would rather be here than in the greatest hospital in the state?”

You do not want people responding to you. They are there to respond to God.

Call to Worship – Come unto Jesus all you are weary... Church, let’s come to Jesus this morning.

Call them to God. Then they know to whom they are singing.

Do all those traditional things (birthdays, anniversaries, etc.) at the beginning and then have a call to worship. Think through these changes with your leaders. Share with them the ‘why’ for the change.

Everything begins with a change of heart. Other changes may come.

3. Pathway that Connects to the Core: Disciple-Making, Mentoring, and Serving

Scripture: Mark 1:15-18, Matthew 18:19-20, 2 Timothy 2:2, Ephesians 2:8-10

Marker: Making disciples who will mentor others and serve through the church.

Steps:

- Disciple-Making: leader will disciple others to become disciple-makers.
 - 3 to 5 people
 - Gender graded (men with men, women with women)
 - Pastor starts the disciple making movement
 - Designed to multiply (1 Timothy 2:2)
- Mentoring: 1 to 1 or 1 to few where leader is equipping individuals for ministry.
 - Specialized areas of service such as pursuing God's call to ministry
 - Technical areas of service that require hours of on-the-job training
 - Disciple-making for new converts is often 1 to 1 or 1 to few
- Serving: Individuals who are using talents, gifts, and abilities in ministry or missions through the local church.
 - Training/Discovery groups for giftedness, doctrine, etc.
 - On-the-job training with individual or group
 - The Body of Christ is created to serve

Guides:

- Disciple-Making
 - Websites: Disciplemakingal.com, onegreatsunday.org, alabamamen.org, warrentalks.com
 - Authors: Bill Hull, Craig Etheredge, Dann Spader, Warren Haynes
 - Blogs/Tools: Disciplemakingal.com
- Mentoring
 - Websites: itslifeministry.com (More Abundant Life)
 - Authors/Books: *More Abundant Life* (itslifeministry.com), *Now That I'm a Christian* (LifeWay)
- Serving
 - SHAPE, PLACE, AIM Ministry (aiministry.com)

Implementers: Pastor, staff, disciples, skilled leaders, willing servants

4. Connect with the Commission: Gospel Conversation and Cultural Connection, Acts 1:8 Lifestyle

Gospel Conversation

Scriptures: Matthew 9:36-38; Matthew 28:18-20; Luke 15:1-10; Romans 1:16, 10:1-17

Marker: Cultivating relationships with unbelievers and leveraging those relationships for the purpose of sharing the good news of Jesus.

Steps:

- Seek to identify lost persons in your community and ways to develop relationships with them.
- Commit to pray specifically and strategically for the lost by name.
- Commit to learning a Gospel presentation.
- Seek opportunities to share the Gospel and/or invite the lost to an event where the Gospel will be shared.

Guides: Who's Your One, The Best News Evangelism Training (available at evangelizeAL.org)

Implementers: Pastor, church members who will train congregation in evangelism (look for those who have a history of personal evangelism).

Cultural Connection

Scriptures: Acts 1:8; Matthew 4:21-22 (workplace); Matthew 9:9-13

Marker: Connecting believers of all levels with non-believers in the local community, residents, and businesses.

Steps: 2020 has given us a completely new set of opportunities to connect with culture around us if we:

- Think differently about ministering to the community
- Connect with local businesses
 - Offer counseling or coaching to employees
 - Prepare meals for employees of local businesses and deliver to the workplace
 - Offer as a church to print special promotional flyers to distribute for locally owned businesses
 - Be a listening ear for business owners/operators
 - Begin with prayer

Let the people of your business community know that you care as a church and are not only present to share revenue. Build bridges that were not possible prior to March 2020.

Live an Acts 1:8 lifestyle to the business community and the residents of the community surrounding your church facility and your ministry area (within a 15-minute drive).

Guides: “Connecting Members to Community” article by George Yates, pages 10-13 of this document; *Loving Your Community*, by Stephen Viars.

Implementers: Look for those with an interest in reaching out or who have reached out to the community in the past. Use a team to investigate community needs.

Connecting Members to Community

By George Yates, Church Health Strategist

The commission of the New Testament church came from Jesus, following His Resurrection and prior to His Ascension. We know it as the Great Commission most often quoted from Matthew 28:19-20. Jesus said, ***Go into all the world...***

Oftentimes pastors and preachers (me included) focus on the word “Go.” The Great Commission is not about waiting for the lost to come into the church. It is about us going, but going where? Going *into* all the world. That four-letter word “into” is a big word and carries an even bigger charge.

We cannot connect with the world unless we go into the world. We carry out the phases of the Great Commission by connecting with those in the world. The place we spend most of our time is in our own community. We carry out the Great Commission as Jesus did, by caring for the needs of the community around us, then the world.

Your community has been impacted by this COVID-19 shutdown and is suffering. Communities will be suffering for months and years to come. Jobs have been lost, businesses have been closed. Restaurants that have remained open for carryout or delivery have been operating on 10% of their normal revenue.

Then, consider the small businesses that were forced to close for those several months. Zero money was coming in, but there was still overhead and the bills to be paid. **Your community is hurting.** But God has placed you and your church in that community for a reason. You cannot bail out the businesses in your community. Therefore, we must put on our thinking caps. But we need new and different thinking caps. We must think outside the normal thought processes of ministering to our community.

To understand the true needs of the community, we must first go *into* the community. We must ask and observe, not rely on our own or the media’s perception. Communities have turned away from the church because they see no relevance. That is not on the community. It is squarely on us, the church.

Here are some ideas you might consider to go *into* your community:

- One church sold T-shirts with their local city emblem on them and raised \$10,000 for struggling businesses in the community.
- Other churches have served their community residents and helped individual businesses at the same time. For example, one church paid for one entire day’s inventory for an ice cream vendor. Everyone who came to his truck that day received free ice cream.
- Other churches have given away free popsicles to community residents.
- Talk to business owners and offer free counseling or motivational talks for their employees.

- Churches could buy multiple small (\$5) gift cards to local businesses and distribute them among the community helping the local economy, businesses and residents.
- Offer a listening ear to business owners and employees.
- Create, print and distribute a flyer throughout the community for supporting local businesses.
- Listen and ask questions: What are their greatest needs and fears in the coming months?

We must get back into the community around us and have honest conversations with the residents, mayors and other elected officials, school administrators, first responders, and business owners. Our conversations must be genuine, soul-searching conversations to unearth the true needs of the community in which God has placed us.

I believe every church has one thing you can do better than anyone else; better than the government, better than the school system, better than any other civic organization or other church. We have developed a couple of tools – a Community Survey and a Strengths Matrix – to help lead you to discovering that one thing. These are being used not only in Alabama, but other states as well.

These tools will assist you in unearthing the true needs of your particular community. One also helps your church determine its true strengths and allows you to involve all members in this discovery process so they have ownership. Then through prayer God will show you how He has gifted your church to specifically meet some of the greatest needs in your community.

Click here for links to those resources:

[Community Survey](#)

[Strengths Matrix](#)

(These are also available at alsbom.org/churchrevitalization, then search Resources.)

The churches who continually ministered in and to their community through this pandemic are already on the road to effective ministry connection with their community. Every church who has connected to their community through ministry during this time of sheltering in place has already begun building a bridge for fulfilling the Great Commission. If your church has not, don't delay. Begin the process today. Begin praying, asking God's favor on opening your heart, mind and eyes in leading your church in connecting to the community.

Then download these free resources provided by the State Board of Missions and begin building your bridge. Call or email our offices. We will help you.

If we are not efficiently connecting to our communities, we cannot begin to fulfill the Great Commission as God intended. Jesus was in the community – whatever community He found Himself in He was daily connecting with those who lived and worked there. The church in

the book of Acts is the same. Why were so many people being added to their number? Because the believers were daily connecting with their neighbors and associates.

This is an area we have neglected and dismissed as churches over the last decades. And it is time to reclaim our role as believers connecting to the community around us. If nothing else, God has allowed us this great opportunity through COVID-19. How can we stand before a loving and just God and say, "But we thought..."? It is time. Let us fully commit to God to lead our churches – God's people – to spiritually connect with each other, connect in ministry, connect to the lost, and connect to the community in which He has placed us. This is our calling and our true reality.

God placed you in your particular community at this particular time in history to share the good news – the Gospel. Each of the ideas mentioned above can lead to Gospel conversations. We want to encourage you to learn and teach others to turn regular conversations into spiritual ones.

Yes, we can turn our common, everyday conversations into spiritual conversations!

That scares some of you, doesn't it? It should not scare any true believer!

One of the ideas several of our churches have unearthed for us to become God's church is to be intentional in our conversations – **intentional about turning our everyday, casual conversations to spiritual matters**. Let me give you some examples:

- When you are in a conversation with a neighbor or friend who is talking about how he loves the outdoors, why not say something like: "*Yes, God sure did a marvelous job, didn't He?*" Then allow the Holy Spirit to guide your next statements and the conversation.
- If in a conversation a coworker begins sharing of the stress in her marriage and a bad home life, why not seize the opportunity to ask her *where she turns for deliverance from her stress?* Then share where you turn – to God. Share with her how God is helping you deal with the stresses of life. Share a scripture verse and invite her to your church to see for herself.
- When a relative or friend begins talking (dreaming) of his/her perfect job, could you not ask, "*What, in your opinion, are most people looking for in their job/lives?*" What an opportunity to share not only the hope we have for eternity but also the hope and promise of a fulfilling life in Christ.
- Your friend mentions a bleak future. Why not ask, "*Why do you suppose so many people consider the future bleak?*" Then rely on the Holy Spirit to help you share of your hope (God's promise) for this life and eternity.

You see, if we are attentive, any conversation can be moved to a spiritual conversation, most times with one question. With one question, worded and delivered correctly, you can unlock doors of opportunity.

Every believer should be comfortable knowing more than one way to share the Gospel.

Share your story. People cannot refute what God has done in your life (or what He is doing).

Tools including The Romans Road, Share Jesus Without Fear, and Life Conversations (3 Circles) are available on our website.

Visit evangelizeal.org for more information on evangelism strategies, events, apologetics training, Biblical tracts and more confidence building resources to strengthen your personal and your churches reach for Christ.

Overarching Essentials for Connect: Pathways that Lead to Connection

Prayer: Bathe the entire process in prayer. The gates of hell cannot prevail against the church *the Lord builds*. Returning to the Lord and His plan for His church is church renewal. Connection to God is essential.

Details of Strategy: This can be accomplished no matter the circumstances.

Simplicity: Step 1... Do this (we recommend) with tools and/or links. Do not become overwhelmed with the whole. Begin with renewal and prayer. Look for the implementers that you have in the church. Implement what you can. Long-term church health will take time and patience. Suggestions have been made concerning leaders for each area of the Pathways process. Look for people who have a history of getting an assigned task accomplished.

Major Factor for Implementation – Coaching: Cohorts, two or three pastors with one or two coaches. Meet via Zoom. Cohorts in other areas may be available as needed, for example, coaching for your worship leader/team.

Focus on the possibilities not the obstacles.



Alabama Baptist
STATE BOARD OF MISSIONS

This resource is made possible by gifts of Alabama
Baptists through the Cooperative Program.