

“Rooted” Series / 1: Connect / July 29, 2018

Vern Huber – Connections Minister

Good morning, glad to see each of you here and welcome to those watching online. I am Vernon Huber, the Connections Minister, and today is Tailgate Sunday. If you came in through the front door you saw the trucks - Bar-B-Que grill - and the games set up all ready for tailgating. I've got my jersey and so I'm ready for the season. UK's first football game is Saturday, Sept. 1. Kick-off at 3:30. If you don't have tickets, the game will air on ESPNU. Also, Cap City Fantasy Football League will be starting soon.

Quickly, let me test your football knowledge:

Slide # 1. First Question

In 1922, the American Professional Football Association was renamed into the National Football League. All other teams have since changed their names or cities too, except for which team?

Answer: Chicago Bears

Slide # 2 Second Question

True or False? There was this great quarterback, Paul D. Hubbard, and he was deaf He created the huddle to confuse the opposing teams into misinterpreting is sign language signals during the game.

Answer: True

Slide # 3 Third Question

True or False? Every football used in the NFL comes from the Wilson factory located at Ada in Ohio. (except for New England, Perry)

Answer: True

Slide # 4 Fourth Question / No answer given

What if I told you that the Baltimore Ravens aren't actually named after the bird?

I am sorry Steve I can't go through with it, I can't pretend anymore. And I apologize to you [people] too. I am not a football fan - I found all this information on the internet to make me look like I am a big football fan. Well, in reality, I'm not.

We all know pretending can be fun - little girls become fairy princesses - little boys become their favorite superhero - dads become Santa Claus - moms pretend to be the damsel in distress for the superhero to save. This style of pretending doesn't hurt, but when struggles and heartache come your way, and

you pretend that it doesn't affect you, that can hurt you. You see, that is exactly what I did.

Wait a minute; you folks don't know me very well. First, I am really not pretending, I am Vern Huber, the Connections Pastor, and I work with the Life Groups. I am married to my lovely bride, Gail, going on 45 years and we have two sons and five grandchildren. I have been a minister over thirty years encompassing worship, education, administration, and preaching. For several years I was the senior minister of a thriving congregation. During that time, God did some amazing things; people were saved - lives were changed - led several mission trips into Honduras and Mexico - people were allowing the Holy Spirit to move in their lives. It was a very exciting time!

However, there was another spirit at work as well. It was the spirit of envy, control, and deceit. Some of the elders allowed this spirit to influence their thinking and their decisions. The decisions they made were damaging the church and I was told I had a choice to make, agree with these decisions, or I would be asked to leave.

I thought, "Are you kidding me, after ten years of working together, this is what it boils down too?" A battle began raging within me, "Where did I go wrong"? What happened to the Spirit of love, joy, and grace that permeated a substantial part of our people? I started blaming myself for the turmoil within the church, and in the leadership. My confidence to lead the church was dwindling. Many false accusations were made concerning my leadership ability, my personal life, and my family. So, I resigned as senior minister, took a public job. Guess what? I ended up with an arrogant, self-centered, micro-managing boss. (I realize none of you ever had that type of boss.) That didn't help my self-esteem at all. So, the turmoil continued inside of me.

Let me add another layer to the struggle. Since I resigned as senior minister, there was the issue of where would we worship? Do we worship in a local church and deal with the questions and whispers? Or do we go out of town so that I can hide? And then I thought, "No, wait a minute, I won't go to church at all, that way the problem is solved." In the midst of this turmoil God connected me with a group of people to lead a Bible study, and so I did. The numbers grew, and a church came into existence. So, at this time in my life I have a public job and pastoring a small church. But, I felt alone, hurt, with no confidence to lead a body of believers let alone, myself. Then more struggles came my way - my dad died ~ my best friend died - my wife, Gail, had two

surgeries in an eight-month period - my sister had colon cancer and eventually moved into our home. The loss and hurt I experienced were too great, so I thought. I put on my happy preacher face and continued to preach and teach. However, Vern needed healing, encouragement, and to feel the grace of God once again. Why am I telling you all of this? Because this is the first time I have publicly admitted that I struggled with depression. I was sad, empty, and anxious – not just for a short time, but for a few years. You see, in my heart, I felt sad and worthless; I didn't want to be around people. I had to force myself to be with a group of people. I also struggled with a lack of self-confidence. You know what I mean. "Why even try, because whatever you try to do will fail".

There was a time that I even wondered if God had left me. I kept asking myself "Why didn't I feel the same way I use to? What had happened to me?" What have I done to deserve all this? You see folks; fear would not allow me to admit to myself to God, or to anybody else that I was hurting. I'm a pastor - a husband - a father » a grandfather- an uncle -I am supposed to be the strong one - I am not supposed to be depressed, to grieve, or hurt emotionally. God had not left me! The problem was, I tried handling these struggles on my own and this is not what God wanted me to do. He wanted to deliver me from my fear - the fear of what my family would think the fear of what my friends would think if I allowed fear to hold me back from connecting with God's mercy and grace.

Dr. Stephen Pattison – Senior Minister

Eph 3.17-19

"I pray that from his glorious, unlimited resources (and God's got them! I pray that) he will empower you (empower you) with inner strength through his Spirit. (Wouldn't that be cool?) Then Christ will make his home in your hearts as you trust in him. (Because God can only empower us to the degree we trust him.) And your roots will grow down (deep; that you will be rooted in) into God's love and (that will) keep you strong ..." (Ephesians 3.16-17)

So, guys, we exist, this church exists, our mission from God is to bring people face to face with Jesus, and to grow them up into Christ-Driven 24-7 Jesus followers. And we take that so seriously ... because it is our mission from God; we believe that! So we try to do it as intentionally, and strategically, and as effectively as we can.

So, this morning we're kicking off a series we're calling "Rooted," and it's about the second half of our mission – building strong, fully mature, God-

loving, people-loving, life-loving Jesus followers. So, over the next 6 weeks we're going to talk about some of the most important "growth catalysts." These are the things we do as Jesus followers to grow strong, to drill our roots down deep, to toughen us up as Jesus followers.

Because ... because it's flat out tragic to see people who have been Jesus followers for 10 or 20 or 30 years who are, in effect, spiritual toddlers ... Or maybe they grow a little, and then stall at spiritual adolescence. It is tragic to see people who never really grow up, who never really grow strong, who never experience the kind of life Jesus came to give us.

And today we are going to unpack the first of these growth catalysts – that's what we are going to call them. Growth catalysts, things that cause us to grow. We call it "Connect." It's on the wall in our Foyer: Worship, CONNECT, Grow, and Serve. And we think connection is huge. ... Here's why ...

Now I kind of set this up about 6 weeks ago in our Rehab series. It's about how God made us. The Bible opens with God creating everything we know.

- First God speaks light into the darkness, and he says, "It's good!"
- Then God creates the seas, and the land, and the plants, and the trees, and what does he say? ____ "It's good!"
- He creates the sun, and the moon, and the stars, and ... _____. "It's good!"
- Then it's the fish, and the birds, and all the animals, and he says _____. "It's good!"
- Then he creates man ... and this time it is "Very good!"

It's good, it's good, it's good, it's very good. And then in chapter 2 there is the first ... "not good." And what is "not good" doesn't have anything to do with Adam and Eve sinning in the Garden of Eden. The first "not good" is this: God says, "It is "not good" for the man to be alone." Alone is not good. In other words, we were not created by God to go it alone.

And here's what blows our minds. Here's the bombshell. You see, God calls man "alone" even though man already is connected with God. Man is already doing life with God. And he has a good relationship with God, it's not messed up by any sin, yet. So man is connected with God ... but it is not good enough. In some way man is still alone; and it is not good for man to be alone, even a man connected with God.

Which means – here it is -- right alongside that God shaped hole in your heart that no one else or nothing else can fill – because he made us to do life with him -- there is also this human shaped hole in your heart that not even God can fill. You see, we were made to do life connected with God, and we were made to do life connected with each other, in God-honoring relationships with each other. There is this human shaped void in us that no thing, no money, no achievement, no busyness, no books, no recreation, not even God himself can fill. Why? Because, that's how God made us. He made us to do life with him, and he made us to do life with each other – to genuinely connect.

So ... if you want to be healthy, if you want to grow strong – you need a serious relationship with God, and you need God honoring relationships with at least a few of the right people.

Here's the problem: we try to fill that God-shaped hole in our hearts with the wrong gods. And ... we try to fill that human shaped hole in our hearts ... with the wrong people. And they just don't satisfy! Instead of making us better, and stronger, they corrupt and degrade us. You see, it's not just about connecting with people; it's about seriously connecting with those who make us better.

Because here's the deal: most of the time (there are exceptions, but most of the time) it is people who draw us to God, and it is people who grow us up as Jesus followers. Way back in seminary, Fred Thompson taught us theology. He as a brilliant man. He was teaching us about the Holy Spirit, and how the Holy Spirit works on us. And he said something I have never forgotten. He said, "Maybe the most powerful tool the Holy Spirit has for growing us is people." And I think he was right.

As I think back on my own life, it was people – my parents, my friends, my teachers – who led me to Christ. And as I think about my faith journey, there are all these people God has used to challenge me, and encourage me, and teach me. And I suspect it's the same for you.

If you have been doing life with God for a while, there are probably a number of people who had a powerful influence on your connecting with God. Maybe it started out with a parent. That's as it should be. Our primary job as parents is to steer our kids towards God. Or maybe it was a friend at school, or some teacher in church, or a professor in college, or someone you worked with, or someone else who connected you, or

reconnected you with God; and then it has been people who have pushed you forward in your life with God.

You see, with very, very few exceptions, we don't come to God without serious connections with serious Jesus followers. I doubt there's a single person in this room who, if they stood up to give their testimony, they'd say ... "I'd like to thank ... well ... nobody. I discovered God on my own, I committed my life to God on my own, I have grown as a Christian on my own, with no one else's help." And if anyone here does think like that, you're probably quite deluded.

Instead we tell stories of people: "My parents brought me to church every Sunday – I hated it at the time." Or, "I was going along doing my own thing when I started sparking with this girl, and she dragged me to church." Or, "One of my friends invited me to this Bible study, and it started me thinking." Or, "I was watching him, or watching her, and they were different, and I wanted what they had." Or, "I was at one of the lowest points in my life, and he drew alongside, and he cared, and he stood with me, and I wanted what he had." ...

Even if you're not a Christian, yet. Maybe you are just here this morning because you are curious, or because you lost a bet or someone drug you here. You may be a little uncomfortable being here "in church." Still, the fact that you are here probably means that someone is trying to nudge you towards God. Someone made you curious, or someone made that bet with you or someone drug you here. The truth is, there are people in this room who would do just about anything short of sin to get you to follow Jesus. Not because they are mean, but because they care about you and they believe this following Jesus stuff works, forever...

Now ... it works the other way too. I'll bet every one of us can think of someone who has pulled us away from God. Can you see any faces? Maybe a family member, or a friend who in some way influenced you to push God away? Maybe they flat out loved mocking God or Christians, or the church. Or, maybe they enticed you to take that first drink, or that first pill, that started you down a path you're not proud of. Or, maybe it was some guy, or some girl who took you to that website, or pulled you into a sexual relationship that you knew was God dishonoring, and as result, you pushed God away, for a time. Or, maybe it was someone whose flirtations

you should have resisted, whose text you never should have answered, whose business deal you should have turned down.

And here's what it especially awful: sometimes the people who have done the most to push us away from God have been Jesus followers. The hypocrisy of so many Christians, the meanness of so many Christians, the narrowness of so many Christians drives people away from God – maybe some of you.

Bottom line: people always shape our life with God, sometimes for good, sometimes for bad. So let me ask you two questions:

- #1: Are those who are closest to you nudging you towards God, or tugging you away from God?
- #2: Are you nudging those around towards God, or are you tugging them away from God? Because ... you are doing one or the other. I'll show you.

Now, I'm going to move pretty fast through this part, because Vern is demanding some more time. But I want to teach 4 big ideas about "Connect" as a growth catalyst. Now this stuff is not hard to understand, it's pretty much common sense. But it's amazing how uncommon common sense is.

Big idea #1: There are no neutral relationships. There are no neutral relationships. Guys, we are shaped by our relationships, and every relationship we have either nudges us towards God, or tugs us away from him. Marty Pinkston used to say that a man is either composing or decomposing. Well, it works the same for our relationships. Every relationship either composes us as Jesus followers, or decomposes us. Because every relationship has a spiritual dimension. Husbands: you are either helping your wife and your kids trust in God, or you are pulling them away from God. Kids, at school, your friends are either building your trust in God, or they are pulling you away from God. And you are doing the same for them. At work, guys, you are either pointing people towards God or pulling them away. None of our relationships are spiritually neutral. They either build a connection with God, or they erode it.

Proverbs 13.20, written by a guy who was considered the smartest man in the world – King Solomon. He says, "Walk with the wise and become

wise; associate with fools and get in trouble.” The Message puts it like this: “Become wise by walking with the wise; hang out with fools and watch your life fall to pieces.” And you’ve seen it happen. What Solomon basically says this: every relationship has a spiritual dimension; every relationship either connects you with God, or disconnects you from him. So ... hang out with people who are wise enough to do life with God, and you’ll grow with them. Hang out with fools, and fool rubs off.

So be honest: Who do you hang with? Who have you permitted to influence your life with God? Now I’m not saying we can’t be friends with people who don’t follow Jesus. God wants us to be friends with those who don’t follow Jesus. But who have you given permission to get so close that they influence your life with God? Guys, the Bible tells us to choose our close friends carefully, because there are no spiritually neutral relationships. Listen: Listen: Your friends will dictate the direction and the quality of your life. (Repeat)

Here’s big idea #2: God will send people into our lives to grow us up as Jesus followers. You see, God brings people into our life all the time; sometimes to challenge our nonsense, and we all have a boatload of it, or sometimes to help us through the tough times. God brings people into your life to bring you the encouragement you need, or to give you the example you need at that moment, or to bring the laughter that you need. I’ll bet you can look back at your life and think of some time when this guy, said exactly what you needed to hear; or when some guy bought your lunch when you were out of money; or when some girl sent you a note or made a phone call when you were just crushed by loneliness. Guys, God used people all the time in the Bible, and he does it all the time for us. He puts people in our path who will push us forward in our life with God. Just a side note: maybe you feel God nudging you to lean in to someone in your world. Maybe you feel him nudging you to give a word of encouragement, or comfort, or challenge, or whatever. He’s going to try to use you too!

But listen; even though God sends people into our lives to grow us as Jesus followers, he also gives us the freedom to push them away. We can choose to be receptive, or resistant. You see, God doesn’t force himself on us. I’ll bet every one of you can think of some person that just kind of came crashing into your life, and they tried so hard to pull you toward God.

And maybe, maybe you just kept pushing them away. And as you think back, you realize that God may have been trying to get your attention through that person, and you just pushed them away. You see, God's going to send them; but we don't have to listen. ... Please listen!

Big idea #3: Satan will send people into your life too, to disconnect you from God. God works through people; Satan does too. God uses people to grow us as Jesus followers; Satan uses people to drag us down. The apostle Paul says, 1 Corinthians 15.33: "Do not be misled (don't be fooled): 'Bad company corrupts good character.'" And it does! Think about it: If Satan hates God (which he does), and if Satan hates what God loves (which includes you), and if Satan wants to corrupt anything that is God honoring, how do you think he'll do it? You see, God sends people into your life to grow us as Jesus followers, and Satan will use people in your life to drag you down. So is there someone dragging your down, dragging you away from God? Or maybe a tougher question: Is there any chance Satan is using you to drag someone else away from God? In either case, maybe you have some repenting to do.

So, big idea #1: There are no neutral relationships. Big idea #2: God will send people into your life to grow you as a Jesus follower. Big idea #3: Satan will also use people in your life too, to drag you down as a Jesus follower. Here's the last one – Big idea #4: We cannot grow into fully mature Christ-Driven 24/7 Jesus followers, we cannot experience the life God's wants us to experience without serious relationships with other Jesus followers who are pulling us towards God. We can't do this alone. We can't stay strong alone. We are not smart enough, strong enough, good enough to make it on our own. God works in community; we drag each other to heaven. We've said this for years: If not Capital City, find some other Christ-centered purpose-driven church and make it your home, because God didn't make us to go it alone.

Now, I want to wrap up my part this morning with two questions.

- Question #1: If you know God will use people to grow your trust in him, are you receptive? Are you putting yourself in a place where God-honoring people can nudge you towards Jesus? Are you seriously trying to connect with people who can grow you as a Jesus follower? Listen: Some of you guys have no close Christian friends.

- You've got to fix that! Some of you guys are content to come here and do church in rows, but never in circles. Come on! Will you be receptive to the people God will move into your path to grow you up? Will you go out of your way to put yourself in places where you can connect with serious Jesus followers?
- Question #2: Are you willing to be used by God to nudge someone towards Jesus? Don't answer quickly; this one is hard. God's going to try to use you. Are you willing to be available to God, so he can work through you to draw someone towards him? He's going to try! Remember: there are no neutral relationships. You are either going to be growing people up, or tearing them down. Are you willing to be used by God?

Guys, I wanted you to hear Vern tell his story this morning. We asked Vern to be our Connections Pastor because he's been pastoring for 30 years, and he knows the danger of being disconnected, and the power of connection. Because guys, this stuff touches pastors too.

- Did you know that about 80% of the Bible College or Seminary graduates who enter the ministry will leave the ministry in the first 5 years?
- Did you know that only about 1 in 10 pastors will actually retire as a pastor?
- Did you know that 70% of pastors do not have anyone they can call a close friend? Do you think those stats are connected?

Because it's not safe to let people get too close, pastors think. Guys, Vern is an old warrior; he has been there, and felt that. He's felt the danger of disconnection, and he's felt the power of Connection. We're lucky to have him. Vern is going to tell you a little more about connecting here at Capital City.

Vern Huber – Connections Minister

After Gail and I sold our home and moved to Frankfort, we attended many churches, some were welcoming and some not so welcoming, and then we came to Cap City, and it was a breath of fresh air to both of us. So, what prompted us to stay at Cap City? First, we were warmly welcomed and felt accepted. Second, the commitment to model what is etched in stone on the front of the building. Full of grace and truth. Gail and I were asked to join a Life Group, and we did. Our Life Group members grew close to one another very

quickly. We began to do life together by sharing our joys, our hurts and struggles. I found a deep healing was going on in my life because of the openness to express my hurts without fear of reprisal, rejection, or finding fault. That's grace and truth in action. You see, I had forgotten how important it is to be connected with other Jesus followers and do life together.

Some of you can relate to my story and some of you may not, but I know whether you do or don't, you will be a healthier Christian by connecting with other Jesus followers. The Staff and leadership of Cap City are committed to providing avenues to connect you with other Jesus-followers and to help you become deeply rooted in your faith. One avenue is Life Groups - a Life Group provides a casual setting connecting you in community and deepening the roots of your faith. Life Groups meet in various homes and at the church building. We are rebooting our Life Group program this fall beginning August 19, with Life Group sign ups. Another avenue is Wednesday evening Growth Groups. This gives you an opportunity to dig deeper and build your faith. Growth Groups will begin on Wednesday, Sept. 5. Meal at 5:30 - classes begin at 6:30. Cap City can provide the avenues for you to get connected and rooted deep in your faith, but it is left up to each one of us to take advantage of the avenues being offered.

So, what is holding you back? Are you going to be like I was and let fear hold you back? Fear will tell you you're not good enough - fear will tell you you're not worthy - fear will convince you that you can handle life on your own - fear will even tell you that no one cares about you and your struggles. Fear is a liar, don't listen to him - get connected and experience God's grace and truth. You don't have to wait till the 19th of August to get connected. Please come and talk with me. I'll be waiting here at the front. Don't let fear hold you back.

Also, I want to draw your attention to the worship stations located around the room. At those stations you will see a black box. That is an offering box for those who call Capital City home and are offering their first portion to God.

Also there is a white Generous Bucket where you can drop in a couple of dollars to help love on people in our church and in the community.

Also, you will see a tray with small pieces of bread representing the Body of Christ, and cups of juice representing the blood of Christ. This time is like a family reunion where the extended family comes together in one place to share in a meal. Come partake of the meal and celebrate Jesus.