

REAL CONNECTIONS IN A DISCONNECTED WORLD

A TED-style talk for a Conference on Wholeness of Mind, Body, and Spirit

Let's do a quick experiment.

Everyone, pull out your phone.
Don't worry, this is the only time I'll encourage it today.

Hold it in your hand and look at it.

Now ask yourself this question:

“When was the last time this device brought me closer to someone's soul?”

Not their calendar.
Not their grocery list.
Not their meme collection.

Their soul.

We live in the most connected generation in human history — and yet, ironically, we are lonelier, more anxious, and more fragmented than ever.

U.S. Surgeon General Magazine quoted "loneliness is an epidemic with health risks comparable to smoking 15 cigarettes a day"

We can FaceTime across the globe... but struggle to have a real conversation across the dinner table.

John Delony in his new book "living a non anxious life "says 60% of society wouldn't know who to call in a time of trouble other than 911"

Humor

- “We have 5,000 friends, 300 contacts we never call, and one person we text from the same couch.”

.....and yet fewer people who actually know us.

My question, Is there any 21st century skill more important than being able to sustain coherent, confident, conversation?

I'm not familiar with it but I'm told in the film "My Fairlady" Mr Higgins gives Eliza some conversation advice "stick to the weather and your health"

But these days with climate change and anti-vaxing these subjects aren't safe either.

So I think we better look for some more solid advice.

Sherry Turkle, in Reclaiming Conversation, says:

“We are lonely but fearful of intimacy. Digital connections offer the **illusion** of companionship without the **demands** of friendship.”

In other words...

We get connection without vulnerability — and **that** leaves us starving.

- Sherry Turkle also notes that we are not anti-technology—we are misusing it.

- The problem isn't screens.

- The problem is screens **replacing** presence instead of **supporting** it

Biblical stories and lessons that help us with real connections.

From the very beginning, Scripture names our deepest need.

Genesis 1:26 And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness:

- God Himself exists in relationship (Father, Son, Spirit)

Genesis 2:18 And the LORD God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him.

- The First “not good” mentioned in the Bible
- We Are Designed for Connection
- Healthy relationships are not luxuries; they are part of emotional and spiritual well-being.
- We are biologically, psychologically, and spiritually wired for connection.

Jordan Peterson in 12 Rules for Life echoes this from a psychological angle:

*"Meaning is found in responsibility and relationship, **not comfort**"*

Yet our culture keeps promising comfort:

- A mattress promises better sleep and less pain.
- A car promises less stress and more safety.
- A streaming service promises escape from boredom.

Let's remember, Comfort is easy, but it never heals loneliness — it numbs it.

Real Connection is cost us something.

Notice:

Adam had a job.

He had a garden.

He had God.

But he didn't have someone.

- Loneliness is not a failure — it's a signal.

Hunger > calls for nourishment
Fatigue > calls for rest
Pain > calls for healing
Loneliness > calls for connection

- Loneliness can be a prompt to pursue meaningful connection.

Modern takeaway: Use loneliness as motivation to build depth, not to settle for dysfunction.

Genesis 3: And they heard the voice of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day

- God doesn't text Adam.
- He doesn't send a notification.
- He shows up - I think it's interesting to note that he shows up by walking.
- Walking implies a pace
- God could have "downloaded instructions to Adam. Instead, He chose presence and shared time

God's solution to brokenness was never distance — it was incarnation.
(God in physical form)

Lesson: Relationship requires presence.

People don't just need advice; they need presence.

- Sitting with someone in grief
- Showing up to important moments
- Being emotionally available

Real connection happens when we are **with** people, not just talking at them.

We have another verse that talks of Jesus presence.

John 1:14 – "The Word became flesh and

dwelt among us.” (God With Skin On - presence)

- Jesus didn't save humanity via a broadcast.
- He saved humanity through shared meals, eye contact, touch, and conversation.

I'd like to expand on this idea of conversation a bit.....

Sherry Turkle shares this idea:

"Phones didn't just change what we do — they changed who we are with. We've traded conversation for convenience"

Why did we do this?

Because Real people can:

- Interrupt us
- Disagree with us
- See our emotions

And that feels risky.

So we choose phones (or other distractions) because they let us avoid the awkwardness, control the conversation and thus escape emotional risk.

But this comes with a **huge** price tag!!

Turkle says:

"Conversation is the most human thing we do — and we're losing it."

Charlie Kirk said “when people stop talking, that's when you get violence.”

There is so much truth in that.

But you'll meet some people could care less if we're losing it.

Sherry tells us what we're losing.

*"Conversation teaches **empathy**. When we lose conversation, we lose the muscle of **empathy**. We become emotionally efficient—but relationally fragile."*

Our connections must be filled with empathy.

Think of empathy like a physical muscle — if you don't use it, it weakens. Conversation is the "exercise" that keeps it strong.

Empathy grows when your goal shifts from being right to understanding their experience.

Try asking: "Help me see this from your side."

Empathy develops when people share:

- fears
- hopes
- disappointments
- small daily emotions

Remember, Feelings are the doorway to connection.

Empathy requires unhurried attention. Eye contact, pauses, and silence are not awkward — they are where understanding forms.

Curiosity keeps empathy alive.

Learn to ask curious questions like

- "What did you mean by that?"
- "What was that like for you?"
- "Is there more you want to say?"

In summary: Empathy doesn't grow from grand gestures — it grows from regular, honest, unhurried conversations.

I'll have more on hurry later.

Luke 10: Story of Mary and Martha

- Martha: distracted, hurried, resentful.
- Mary: attentive, present, listening.

Remember Jesus response

“You are worried and upset about many things... but only one thing is necessary.”

- Mary practiced presence
- Presence is often mistaken for laziness.
- False: sometimes for real connections all that is needed is presence.
- In the Kingdom of God, presence is productivity.

Modern Day Martha's

- schedule meetings while sitting in another meeting.
- multitask conversations (which really isn't possible)
- check notifications while visiting with others
- listen not to understand but with the intent to reply while waiting to speak.
-

Humor

“We don't interrupt people anymore — we just glance at our phones while they're talking.”

I'd like to take some thoughts from John Mark Comer in "The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry" he gives us a lot of solid advice.

He argues that God moves at the speed of love—and love is slow.

“Hurry is incompatible with love.”

"Hurry is the great enemy of spiritual life today."

- Love requires time, hurry steals our time
- Love, joy, peace, and patience - all require time
- Hurry kills empathy (we discussed this earlier)
- Hurry trains us to prioritize what is loud over what is important.
 - Relationships are rarely urgent—but they are always essential.
 - We don't drift into deep relationships; we drift into shallow ones.
 - You cannot rush relationship

* Comer recommends the 3 S's of intentional slowing:

- Silence
- Simplicity
- Sabbath (I'll expand on this one)

Sabbath is not just spiritual obedience — it's emotional maintenance.

Relationships thrive on attention, and Sabbath trains attention.

Sabbath teaches “being with people” instead of “using people.” (Practical for teachers - how do we view students?)

It's less about a strict rule and more about a relational posture:

You cannot deeply love people at the speed of hurry.

Sabbath gives love room to breathe.

Remember These are not spiritual luxuries, They are relational necessities.

Jesus modeled all of these

He walked.

He stopped.

He noticed people.

He talked to children.

He ate with sinners.

He lingered.

The Son of God was never in a rush.

John 4 Look at the woman at the well

- Different ethnicity
- Different gender
- Broken past

Jesus sees her

Jesus stops.

He listens.

He asks questions.

He speaks truth with compassion

He stays present outcome

- Results: A transformed life and restored community

And she leaves saying:

“Come see a man who told me everything about my life.”

Not:

“He liked my post.”

“He shared my story.”

He saw me.

That’s what we all want.

To be seen.

To be known.

To be loved without a filter.

Jesus’ Model

- Presence before correction
- Listening before speaking
- Love before instruction

Isn't it ironic? Jesus asked a lot of questions. We mostly give advice

Ruth 1: Story of Ruth and Naomi

- Ruth chooses commitment over convenience.
- “Where you go, I will go.”
- Real connection requires cost.

Truth for us:

- The people we admire most relationally are not the most impressive.
- They are the most faithful.
- Let's be that faithful relational person

Luke 24: The two on the Emmaus Road

- Jesus walks with two discouraged disciples.
 - He listens.
 - He explains.
 - He breaks bread.
- “Their eyes were opened.”

Insight

- Revelation followed relationship.
- Healing followed presence.

Ephesians 4:15 "Speak the truth in love."

One of Jordan Peterson's rules is:

“Tell the truth — or at least don't lie.”

- Relationships deteriorate when truth is sacrificed for comfort.
- Avoiding hard conversations creates emotional debt.
 - Truth without love becomes harsh, judgmental, and cold.
 - Love without truth becomes shallow, enabling, or dishonest.

Healthy relationships balance both:

- Speak honestly
- Care deeply
- Correct gently

- Forgive generously

It's not choosing one over the other — it's holding both at the same time.

You cannot have real connection if you are performing instead of being.

Social media culture trains us to:

- Curate
- Edit
- Highlight
- Hide

Relationship principle: You can't fake character in close relationships for long.

- Consistency matters
- Integrity shows over time
- Authenticity builds trust

True connection comes from being real, not performing.

Intimacy & relationship require honesty.

You can't be deeply known if you're always pretending to be okay.

Vulnerability isn't weakness.

It's the door to relationship.

Connection Recap

Practice Presence

- Phone down.
- Eye contact
- Be where you are

Assignment: have one phone free conversation this week.

Embrace Awkwardness

- Silence isn't failure — it's space.
- Visiting grandpa Raymond and he apologizes for the silence
- Job and his 3 friends should have kept their silent "conversation" going
- Depth lives just past discomfort

Slow Down on Purpose

- Love moves at walking speed
- Sabbath isn't just rest from work.
- It's rest for relationships.
- Real connection doesn't happen when life slows down — it happens when we choose to slow down for people

Assignment: have at least one unhurried conversation this next month.

Practice empathy

- Slow down your response
- Reflect what you hear
- Ask open ended questions
- Resist the urge to top their story - it's not about you or how amazing you are.

Stephen Hawkins when asked in a NY Times interview about his IQ, he said "I have no idea, People who boast about their IQ are losers.

- Follow up later

Tell the Truth in Love

- Address resentment early.
- Speak honestly.
- Repair broke conversations quickly.

Listen

- If your mouth is open you're not listening.
- Steven Covey said "Most people do not listen with the intent to understand; they listen with the intent to reply.

Be curious

- Be interested in other people

- Prepare yourself to be amazed when talking with people

Bill Nye “Everyone you will ever meet knows something you don’t.”

What this means, every person is a potential teacher if you approach them with curiosity instead of certainty.

In closing.....

We don’t need more technology.
We need more togetherness.

We don’t need better devices.
We need better dinners, better conversations, better listening.

Jesus summed it up perfectly:

“Love the Lord your God... and love your neighbor as yourself.”

Not your neighbor’s profile.
Not your neighbor’s posts.

Your neighbor.

The most radical act in a disconnected world is simple:

Be present.
Be honest.
Be slow.
Be loving.

That’s how we heal our minds.
That’s how we restore our bodies.
That’s how we reconnect our spirits.

And that’s how we find each other again. 

