



The whole world is connected. In the early 1990s, the world would change because of the world wide web. Previously, you could make a phone call and be connected to just about anyone in the world, but the world was connected now like never before. Information could be shared, and relationships formed with a click of a button. Families thousands of miles apart could be connected as if they lived in the same town. The internet revolutionized how the world was connected.

Then in 2004, one company changed the way our relationships were connected through the World Wide Web. Facebook was founded. If everyone was connected before, now they *really* were. Now you could see people whose lives lived on display for you to see. Social media was born. Since that time, many other forms of social media have sprung up to seek to capitalize on the connection and relationships that we all have.

The crazy thing is, with all the connectivity we have, we are the least connected than we've ever been. What was supposed to foster community has led to a fake kind of community. We don't really get to know people anymore. We text instead of talk and we think people's lives are only what they put on their news feed. Our communication has been boiled down to a few Snaps. What was supposed to enhance our relationships has actually left us less connected than we've ever been.

One of the most foundational aspects of our lives, from the time we are born until the time we die, is relationships. We all have them. You immediately form a relationship with your family even before you are born. Many people start having friends from the time they are one or two years old. It doesn't take long to start forming enemies as well. The second a kid takes your toy, you learn really quick that relationships can include enemies. No matter what kind of relationships we have, we have to admit that relationships are foundational to every single person that is alive. We can't get away from them. They are as natural as breathing. We were created to be connected – in relationships.

Our most foundational relationship is our relationship with God. Most of us understand that, even though we don't always live like it. God is Trinity, three in one: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. He has always existed and has

been in perfect relationship with Himself for all eternity. If anyone knows anything about being connected, it is God. Then God created us. He created us to be connected, in relationship with Him. You see Him walking and talking with Adam and Eve from the very beginning. But soon, sin entered in, and that relationship between God and man was fractured.

Most of us understand this. We intrinsically know that we were created for relationship with God. But here's the deal - we can't tangibly see God. So, how do we live out this relationship with the God who created us to be in relationship with Him? It is played out through those we CAN tangibly see. We can tangibly see our friend, our mother, our bully, and our loved one. We can see them, and we interact with them. And how we act or do not act towards them is the most foundational aspect of our life here on Earth.

Yes, our most foundational relationship is with God. But that relationship is played out through every single one of our relationships on Earth, both good and bad. How we act towards one another is how the finite, tangible world sees the infinite intangible God.

So, Jesus entered the scene, God in the flesh, coming to mend the fractured relationship. It was promised all the way from Adam and Eve that God would come to make things right.

Genesis 3:15 [ESV]-

I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel."

God cares about relationships. He has come to make a way when there shouldn't be a way. This verse from Genesis 3 is what is called the protoevangelium, meaning "first gospel." It is God promising from the very beginning, good news. God was going to make things right.

Since then, God had told His people for thousands of years how they were to live. The first commandment that His people were to live by is that they should love God above all else. He should be first in the relationship. There should be nothing else before Him in their hearts and in their lives. Then Jesus, God in the flesh, showed up and seems to add to this command that has been taught for thousands of years. As Jesus quoted Deuteronomy and Leviticus in this passage we are about to read, what we will see is that He showed how the command was actually to be lived out.

Matthew 22:36-40 (ESV)

36 “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?” 37 And he said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. 38 This is the great and first commandment. 39 And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. 40 On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.”

So, we see Jesus say the Great Commandment is to love God and love others. Here’s the deal - we cannot separate the two. How we love other people is how we love God. Jesus says the second is like it because the second is how we live out the first. Not only that, but how we love others is often how others see the love of God. How we, as Christians, act towards others is often how others see God as acting toward them. So, if the way we act towards others (friends, family, foes, and strangers) is how the world sees God, here’s the big question: are each of my relationships reflecting who God is? That’s the question I want each of us to ponder in our hearts throughout this night and within this series.

We talked about God being intangible and unseen. Well, God becomes tangible to people through you. That's why your relationships matter. Each one. So, are your relationships reflecting who God is?

There have been times when God has appeared tangibly to people. One of those is Moses.

Exodus 34:5-8 (ESV)

5 The Lord descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the Lord. 6 The Lord passed before him and proclaimed, “The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, 7 keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation.” 8 And Moses quickly bowed his head toward the earth and worshiped.

God is merciful and gracious. He is slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness. He forgives iniquity and transgression and