**Connecting**

**And God called the dry land Earth;**

**and the gathering together of the waters called the Seas:**

**and God saw that it was good.**

***(Genesis 1:10)***

**Our steps are made firm by the Lord,**

**though we stumble, we shall not fall headlong,**

**for the Lord holds us by the hand.**

***(Psalm 37:23-24)***

**For wherever two or three are gathered in my name,**

**I am there among them.**

***(St. Matthew 18:20)***

**I will live in them and walk among them,**

**and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.**

***(2 Corinthians 6:16)***

While almost all of us feel a deep need to connect, does connecting affect our health and well being? When the two of us began identifying components that nurture the soul and contribute to healing in community, we suspected that connecting adds to physical and emotional health. However, we had no direct confirmation of this. One day, just before leaving on one of our tours, we happened to hear on National Public Radio a panel discussing a fascinating study on the impact of connecting. Janet called the station the next day and found that the report had just been published in the Journal of the American Medical Association (June 25, 1997). In a well-controlled study with 276 healthy volunteers, Dr. Sheldon Cohen and his colleagues found that six meaningful connections every two weeks significantly improve our defenses against viral infection. Less than 35 percent of the people who connected with six or more different people in the previous two weeks came down with a cold when receiving a cold virus. In contrast, 62 percent of those who had connected with only one to three different people in the previous two weeks caught a cold when given the virus. *(Robert and Janet Ellsworth, in Congregations as Healing Communities)*

A bachelor, just turned 40, began feeling desperate. "I went to a singles bar," he told a friend, "walked over to this 20-year-old woman and asked, "Where have you been all my life?" She said, "Teething." *(Mack McGinnis, in Quote magazine)*

**Friends with benefits: Being lonely can make you physically sick. A Carnegie Mellon University study found that college students with few friends and little social support had a 16 percent weaker immune response to a flu shot than did their classmates. Researchers theorize that loneliness may depress immune systems by increasing psychological stress and decreasing the amount of sleep people get. A second study of more than 3,000 men found that those who had the fewest social interactions every week had the highest levels of an inflammatory marker that plays a role in heart disease. Researcher Sarah Pressman of Carnegie Mellon University says that the key factor is a subjective experience of social support, not the actual number of friends. “Loneliness is the perception of being alone,” she tells New Scientist. “You can have many friends yet feel lonely.” (The Week magazine, May 20, 2005)**

**In a world where bad deeds are celebrated and good ones relegated to page 49 of the paper, where first place goes to push and shove and the cost of things is put above the cost of time together, isn’t it wonderful that, from time to time, the best of us reach out and touch the rest of us? (Lois Wyse, in Good Hoosekeeping)**

**When my kids were newborns, they each felt like an extension of my own body – an organ that could occasionally be handed off to others but was practically still part of me. (Research actually indicates that some of a fetus’s cells stay on inthe birth mother’s body – cells travel through the placenta into her heart, lungs, kidneys, skin, and brain and remain there, part of her, for the rest of her life.) And now, even though they’re older, even though they no longer drink the food that my body once made for them, even though we no longer sleep in the same bed for all or part of the night (most of the time), the boundaries between my body and their bodies is still perilously thin. *(Danya Ruttenberg, in Nurture The Wow, p. 172)***

**Grandma: “You and Buster sure seem to be bonding.” Grandpa: “Yeah, he’s a cute little rascal, isn’t he? Just look at that face!” Grandma: “You might want to try the other end.” *(Brian Crane, in Pickles comic strip)***

**I recently learned that most people approach horses the wrong way. Rather than an outstretched hand or a friendly pat on the neck, horses respond more to someone who breathes slowly and deeply into their nostrils so that they can capture the essence of that person’s smell. This is, in fact, how horses greet and bond with each other. It is their ritual. Too many companies have sterile atmospheres with look-alike desks and people with expressionless faces going through monotonous motions. I wonder if anyone at the top has tried to bond with these people. Instead of walking by and patting them on the back, CEOs should get “nostril to nostril” with them and take the time to “breathe in their world” as much as they want them to live and breathe theirs. *(Laurie Beth Jones, in Jesus, CEO, p. 272)***

**People got cancer just to educate me. There have been times in six years where I have been so mixed up and so confused, I can't wait for the person to come over to the house to tell me their story so I can figure out mine. *(Dr. Paul Brenner)***

**Service for Company Communicators, a publication of the National Association of Manufacturers, advises: Carpooling helps the nation by reducing oil use and pollution. It helps management by getting employees to work on time. It helps workers by cutting travel costs. And it boosts productivity by getting the small talk out of the way before work begins. *(Reader's Digest)***

**The cartoon mascots that appear on cereal boxes, such as Cap'n Crunch and the Trix rabbit, are routinely designed so that their eyes tilt down by 9.6 degrees -- the perfect angle to make eye contact with a child standing in the supermarket aisle, according to a study by Cornell University. *(CNBC.com, as it appeared in The Week magazine, April 18, 2014)***

**There is almost a sensual longing for communion with others who have a large vision. The immense fulfillment of the friendship between those engaged in furthering the evolution of consciousness has a quality impossible to describe. *(Pierre Teilhard de Chardin)***

**Nothing seems to make children more affectionate than sticky hands. *(Franklin P. Jones, in Quote magazine)***

**We need a spirit of community, a sense that we are all in this together. If we have no sense of community, the American dream will wither. *(Bill Clinton, U.S. president)***

**A pastor went to see a man who didn’t attend church very faithfully. The man was sitting before a fire, watching the warm glow of the coals. It was a cold winter day, but the coals were red hot, and the fire was warm. The pastor pleaded with the man to be more faithful in meeting with the people of God, but the man didn’t seem to be getting the message. So the pastor took the tongs beside the fireplace, pulled open the screen, and reached in and began to separate all the coals. When none of the coals was touching the others, he stood and watched in silence. In a matter of moments, they were all cold…. The man got the message. *(John MacArthur)***

**A team of medical experts in Virginia contends you’re more likely to catch the common cold viruses by shaking hands than by kissing. *(L. M. Boyd, in Boyd’s Book of Odd Facts, p. 11)***

**Hagar: “You complain that we never do anything together, but when I suggest something, you don’t want to do it!” Wife: “Helping you dig a hole to bury the garbage isn’t my idea of togetherness!” *(Chris Browne, in Hagar The Horrible comic strip)***

**It’s an attraction that you can play them by yourself, but you pay the price. Computer games, even those on-line between live opponents, lack the nonverbal cues and digressions that are a rich part of spending time with another person face to face. And these subtle rhythms of companionship are essential to health and resiliency. *(Gene Cohen, in Reader’s Digest)***

**A conference is a gathering of important people who singly can do nothing but together can decide that nothing can be done. *(Fred Allen, comedian)***

**Still deeper connections between ourselves and the galaxies are being discerned. Astrophysicists studying the chemical composition of stars, and biologists investigating the chemical composition of our bodies, have found that we are made of much the same allotment of elements as is our galaxy: The metals found in trace elements in our bodies appear to have been formed in the explosion of stars that died before the sun was born, seeding space with the metal-rich dust and gas from which our solar system and, eventually, ourselves were formed. *(Timothy Ferris, in Reader's Digest)***

**The hell of the modern dinner party is that interesting people never want to talk about themselves, and boring people ask no questions. *(Mindy Kaling, actor, on Twitter)***

**The key to finding happiness during this time is not through social distancing but through distance socializing, wrote the authors of the World Happiness Report in March. Maintaining ties with friends, colleagues and family, they continued, "is crucial." *(Kimberly Lankford in AARP The Magazine / Real Possibilities, September 2020)***

**To say, my fate is not tied to your fate, is like saying, your end of the boat is sinking. (*Hugh Downs, veteran radio and television newsman)***

**For the first time, more than 1 billion people -- roughly 1 out of every 7 people on earth -- logged on to Facebook in a single day last week. *(Slate.com, as it appeared in The Week magazine, September 11, 2015)***

**Family reunions are when people travel from the four corners of the earth to get together with all the relatives they’ve moved to the four corners of the earth to get away from. *(The Comedy Corner)***

**And it is still true, no matter how old you are, when you go out into the world, it is best to hold hands and stick together. (Robert Fulghum, in All I Needed To Know I Learned in Kindergarten)**

**Furry Pets, Healthier Babies: The therapeutic value of pets is well-known, but a new Canadian study takes it to another level, suggesting that women with animals have healthier babies. Researchers asked the mothers of more than 700 children about pets they owned during pregnancy and for three months after delivery. They found that babies exposed to furry animals -- especially dogs -- have significantly higher levels of Ruminococcus and Oscillospira, two beneficial gut bacteria associated with a lower risk for allergies and obesity, ScienceDaily.com reports. The researchers explain that pet bacteria enhance a newborn's resistance to those chronic, health issues. Prenatal pet exposure also reduces the risk that mothers will pass vaginal group B strep (GBS) -- linked to sepsis, pneumonia, and meningitis -- to children during delivery. Eventually, a "dog in a pill" may be developed to help confer these health benefits, predicts study author Anita Kozyrskyj. "It's not far-fetched that the pharmaceutical industry will try to create a supplement of these microbiomes," she says, "much like was done with probiotics." *(The Week magazine, April 28, 2017)***

**Forty years of separation ended October 3, 1990, when East and West Germany reunited. Mass relocations from East to West – begun in early 1989 – and the creation of a pro-reunification parliament following East Germany’s first free elections in March 1990 hastened progress toward a treaty in which the five East German states joined West Germany. In Berlin thousands gathered to mark the occasion. “It overcame a division that never represented the will of the people,” said a resident. Economic and cultural adjustments will occupy the country for the next two decades. *(Alison McLean, in Smithsonian magazine)***

**Showing or extending an open hand in greeting, as in a handshake, goes back to our earliest history. It indicates that we come in peace, carrying no weapons. *(Barbara Seuling, in You Can’t Sneeze with Your Eyes Open, p. 4)***

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**Remember when we were urged to reach out and touch someone? said Leonard Pitts. The need for simple human contact hasn’t changed, but in a world defined by lawsuits and suspicion, hugging has officially become a highly suspicious activity – a doorway to molestation or sexual harassment. Recently, Fossil Hill Middle School in Fort Worth announced that its students would no longer be allowed to embrace or even hold hands. School districts as far-flung as Bend, Oregon, Des Moines, and Orlando have enacted similar edicts. We’re not talking about banning groping or making out. “We are talking about hugs,” that simple act of affirming one another’s humanity. It’s all part of the pattern of modern life, which seems designed to deepen our isolation. On the telephone, we don’t speak to live operators but to voice-recognition software. We conduct business by e-mail, “watch television in separate room, eat dinner in shifts, and go about cocooned by iPod tunes.” As for kids who like a teacher or fellow student to hug them now and then, well, too bad. If they crave reassurance of simple human contact, they’ll “henceforth have to write text messages instead.” *(The Week magazine, October 19, 2007)***

**Good week for: hugging, after Brian Feldman, a Florida conceptual artist, spent Father’s Day giving his dad a 24-hour hug while the two stood in a boxing ring. Feldman called it “both a healing and transformative experience.” *(The Week magazine, July 1-8, 2011)***

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**Social connections are as important to our survival and flourishing as the need for food, safety, and shelter. But over the last 50 years, while society has been growing more and more prosperous and individualistic, our social connections have been dissolving. We volunteer less. We entertain guests at our homes less. We are getting married less. We are having fewer children. And we have fewer and fewer close friends with whom we’d share the intimate details of our lives. We are denying our social nature, and paying a price for it. Over the same period of time that social isolation has increased, our levels of happiness have gone down, while rates of suicide and depression have multiplied.” *(Emily Esfahani Smith, in The Atlantic)***

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Prior to the Internet, the last technology that had any real effect on the way people sat down and talked together was the table. *(Clay Shirky, writer)*

**10% of Americans under 50 say they would be willing to implant a device in their brain to be connected to the Internet, if that were possible. *(Zogby, as it appeared The Week magazine, June 4, 2010)***

**INTERNET USE: 43%: Percentage of teens who say they use instant-messaging (Ims) to express something they wouldn’t say in person. 22%: Percentage of teens who say they use IMs to ask people out or to accept dates; 13% say they use them to break up. *(Associated Press, as it appeared in Time magazine, December 3, 2007)***

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**It took a hundred years to connect a billion people by wire. It has taken only ten years to connect the next billion people. *(Thomas B. Allen, in National Geographic)***

**If a man does not make new acquaintances as he advances through life, he will soon find himself left alone. A man, sir, should keep his friendship in constant repair. *(Samuel Johnson)***

**If everybody worldwide joined hands in one long line, said line would stretch about 152 times around Earth. That’s more than 3.8 million miles. *(L. M. Boyd)***

**Although the inner journey is a solo one, through encouragement, motivation, inspiration, and prayer, the support of caring friends can make it easier for you to achieve your transformation. (Richard & Mary-Alice Jafolla, in The Quest , p. 30)**

**The meeting of two personalities is like the contact of two chemical substances. If there is any reaction, both are transformed. *(Carl Jung)***

**Jonas Read, 19, and Austin Pence, 22, grew up together in Florida, playing videogames, going to movies, and racing go-karts. But last year, Pence learned that his kidneys were failing and that he would need a transplant. No relatives could provide a match, so he began grueling, thrice-weekly dialysis sessions. Then Read got tested and learned that he could safely donate one of his kidneys to his friend. The surgery took place on July 31, and both donor and recipient are doing well. “I don’t know how to explain it,” Reed says of their friendship. “It’s just like a connection you get.” *(The Week magazine, September 12, 2008)***

**Estee Lauder, billionaire baroness of the beauty industry, was the daughter of immigrants. During the Depression, she sold her uncle’s skin-cream concoctions. “I was single-minded in the pursuit of my dream,” Lauder says, referring to her goal of owning a beauty-products company. She worked her way out of beauty parlors and into department stores, manning counters with unforgettable flair. “Never say, ‘May I help you?’ she states. “Say, ‘Madam, won’t you please let me show you how this finest of creams, created from only pure ingredients, can make your complexion glow with youth and radiance?’” Then she would touch the woman’s face, look into her eyes and press a sample into her hand. *(Jaclyn Fierman, in Fortune magazine)***

**Why can’t we build orphanages next to homes for the aged? If someone’s sitting in a rocker, it won’t be long before a kid will be in his lap. *(Cloris Leachman)***

**I live in a world of my own, but visitors are always welcome. *(Ashleigh Brilliant, in Pot-Shots)***

**Man loves company even if it is only that of a small burning candle. *(Georg Christoph Lichtenberg)***

**Paul McCartney refuses to live inside a Beatles bubble, says Paul Farhi in The Washington Post. McCartney’s former band mate and best friend, John Lennon, was killed by a crazed fan on the streets of New York City, but McCartney moves about his adopted homes in the Hamptons and in New York without fear, bodyguards, or disguises. Sometimes, McCartney, 67, shops for groceries by himself; sometimes he goes bowling. Now and then he takes in a movie with his girlfriend, Nancy Shevell, and talks so much that strangers hush him up. Not long ago, he boarded a New York City bus and found a seat among the startled passengers. Finally, one woman blurted out, “Hey! Is you Paul McCartney?” To which he responded, “‘Yeah, I am!’ So I said, ‘Look, honey. Don’t shout across the bus. Come and sit here!’” The two had a nice chat, as the other passengers gaped, and then McCartney got off at his stop and melted into the crowd. Encounters like that, McCartney says, remind him of the life he had before he became a household name. “I don’t shrink away. No Point. I’m from Liverpool, you’ve just got to get with it. It grounds you, you know. “It’s a balance thing. I’m just one of the people on the bus.” *(The Week magazine, August 14, 2009)***

**Let no one ever come to you without leaving better and happier. *(Mother Teresa)***

**When one tugs at a single thing in nature, he finds it attached to the rest of the world. *(John Muir)***

**Murray's spontaneous life: Bill Murray likes to connect with strangers, said Gavin Edwards in Rolling Stone. He's given a rousing speech at a random guy's bachelor party and climbed behind a far in Austin to pour drinks for patrons. He's turned up at a Stockholm nightclub in a stolen golf cart, read poetry to construction workers, and once got behind the wheel of an Oakland taxi that was taking him home so the overworked cabbie -- a wannabe musician -- could sit in the back and practice playing the saxophone. "It was awesome," Murray recalls. Murray, 64, stages these surreal, often spontaneous interactions with the public largely for the joy of making other people happy. "No one has an easy life. It's this face we put on, that we're not all getting rained on." These things, he admits, are also a form of mindfulness therapy for himself. "My hope, always, is that it's going to wake me up. I'm only connected for seconds, minutes a day, sometimes. And suddenly, you go, 'Holy cow. I've been asleep for two days. I've been doing things, but I'm just out.' If I see someone who's out cold on their feet, I'm going to try to wake that person up. It's what I'd want someone to do for me. Wake me the hell up and come back to the planet." *(The Week magazine, December 12, 2014)***

**Orthopedist chatting with tree surgeon: "One of my patients went skiing last weekend, Roy, and he ran into one of your patients." *(George Lemont, United Feature Syndicate)***

**Self-made multimillionaire H. Wayne Huizenga is chairman of Blockbuster Entertainment Group and owns the Florida Marlins baseball team, the Miami Dolphins football team and the Florida Panthers hockey team. Many Floridians are, therefore, surprised when they learn that his home phone number is listed in the Broward County phone book. “I am listed,” Huizenga says, “because I believe that when you are in business, people who are angry should have the right to look you up and tell you so.” *(Dan Le Batard, in Miami Herald)***

**With all the vast technology of our space age, there’s still nothing more powerful than one human being reaching out to another. *(Clarke Covington, manager of the Space-Station Project at NASA’s Johnson Space Center)***

**Each coterie has its own grazing area aboveground. But prairie dogs spend most of their lives in underground burrows that can run anywhere from 1 to 20 feet below the surface. Many of the tunnels are connected underground so the animals can mingle. In their burrows, the mother prairie dogs give birth to litters of two to 10 pups. Sometimes several coteries combine into a prairie dog town stretching for 160 acres or more, with as many as 12 to 15 dogs per acre. *((Barbara Peruzzi)***

**One young curate was being transferred from one parish to another. The day before he was to leave, a little girl ran up to him and tearfully threw her arms around him in a good-by embrace. The priest consoled the child, kissing her cheeks while cheerfully saying, “And where did you get those cute rosy cheeks?” “Oh, the little girl replied, smiling, “that’s poison ivy!” *(Rachel Burkholder, in Reader’s Digest)***

**A cute little puppy has great appeal, but not even Father Donald Brownstein of St. Patrick Parish in Colorado Springs, Colorado, knew how much appeal. Father Brownstein, in his first weekend as pastor, preached on the subject of community. “We all need each other and are not meant to be alone,” he told the assembly. “Even my 7-month-old beagle puppy doesn't like to be alone.” As he continued to talk, a small black, white and tan beagle puppy wandered in a side door of the church. Immediately the pup perked up his ears and trotted straight to Father Brownstein. As the assembly exploded into laughter, the puppy jumped against the priest's knees and wagged his tail in delight. “I have no idea how my dog got here,” said a stunned Father Brownstein as he watched the puppy frisk around his feet. “I told you, he hates to be alone.” The puppy named John-Luke, had dug a hole under the fence of the nearby rectory. He traced Father Brownstein to church and, since the doors were propped open, invited himself in. John-Luke's appearance was so perfectly timed that some parishioners thought the priest had set up the event. In the meantime, the incident is the talk of the parish. One member said, “Too bad we didn't get the whole thing on video. We could have won $10,000 for the church.” (The Pantagraph, Bloomington/Normal, Illinois)**

**The two elemental components of salt, sodium (Na) and chlorine (Cl), are both very nasty elements on their own. Sodium is a highly reactive metal that will burst into flames and explode when added to water. Chlorine gas was used as a weapon during World War I and was responsible for ninety-one thousand deaths. *(Don Voorhees, in The Indispensable Book of Useless Information, p. 117)***

**\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*When I was 16, my friends turned on me. I felt them gradually excluding me over several months, but the real break came the day a half-dozen of my buddies gang-tackled me, rammed me through a hedge, and fell on top of me. As I fought furiously to get them off me, I saw in their eyes that my pain and rage was the whole point, and that my new status as scapegoat had been discussed and planned. I didn’t know why, but there were more tacklings and humiliations, and then one night, a mob of them tied me to a telephone pole far from home and left me wriggling there. I got it through my head that night that these were no longer my friends, and that was the last I saw or heard from them. I simply stopped going where they went, and found some safety and solace in my exile. This, of course, was all before bullies and mindless sadism could follow you home, and climb right out of your computer screen or cell phone. I have two teenagers now, and have seen firsthand how dramatically social media have changed the experience of adolescence. It is hardly all bad: Facebook, texting, et al., can serve as a kind of warm cocoon, enveloping young people in the constant attention of their peers. Social media are no more inherently good or evil than a gun or a car or any other piece of technology. They simply amplify and extend what is already in our hearts – our hunger for connection, our perverse capacity for cruelty. Still, I am glad I am not 16 today. *(William Falk, in The Week magazine, October 15, 2010)***

**Because of social-networking sites like Facebook, 57% of American adults say they feel more connected to people now than they did previously. 54% say they’ve had less face-to-face contact with friends as a result. *(Harris Poll, as it appeared in The Week magazine, November 5, 2010)***

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**Herman asks his friend: “I’m planning a solo voyage around the world. D’you want to come with me?” *(Jim Unger, in Herman comic strip)***

**Every creature has a need for companionship as biologically important as food and drink. Testing tadpoles, zoologists have found that even these humble creatures are so deeply influenced by social need that a solitary tadpole can regenerate an injured part of its body only slowly, but if it is given the dimly sensed comradeship of fellow tadpoles its healing powers speed u0p almost miraculously. University of Chicago scientists have discovered that when mice are raised in contact with fellow mice they grow faster than mice reared on an identical diet in isolation. *(Alan Devoe, in The Living World of Nature, p. 245)***

**Two California professors have installed three pink seesaws across the U.S. - Mexican border wall running between Sunland Park, New Mexico, and Ciudad Juarez, Mexico, allowing children on both sides of the border to play together. Ronald Rael of the University of California, Berkeley, one of its designers, said the "Teetertotter Wall" vividly illustrates that "actions that take place on one side have a direct consequence on the other side." *(Agence France-Presse, as it appeared in The Week magazine, August 16, 2019)***

**Touching is a beautiful way of connecting. When your wife brushes her hand against yours, when your son places a hand on your shoulder, when you shake the hand of a friend, you can choose to let these be deep moments of connections. *(Thomas & Beverly Bien, in Mindful Recovery: A Spiritual Path to Healing From Addiction)***

**Inventor Charles Foley said that a good game has to involve “a bit of skill, a bit of chance, sticking it to an opponent – and watching it has to be entertaining.” He and a co-inventor hit all those marks in 1966 when they invented Twister, a party game that intertwines players in sometimes intimate contortions. The game became a sensational hit in an era when everyone seemed eager to break down social barriers. “If you take your shoes and socks off,” Foley once said, “anybody will become a different person.” *(The Week magazine, July 26, 2013)***

**Just as the wave cannot exist for itself but must always participate in the swell of the ocean, so we can never experience our lives by ourselves but must always share the experience of life that takes place all around us. *(Alan Paton)***

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