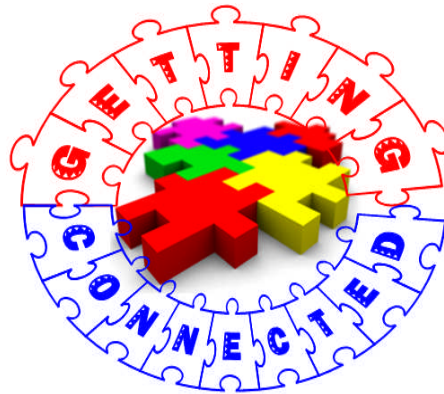




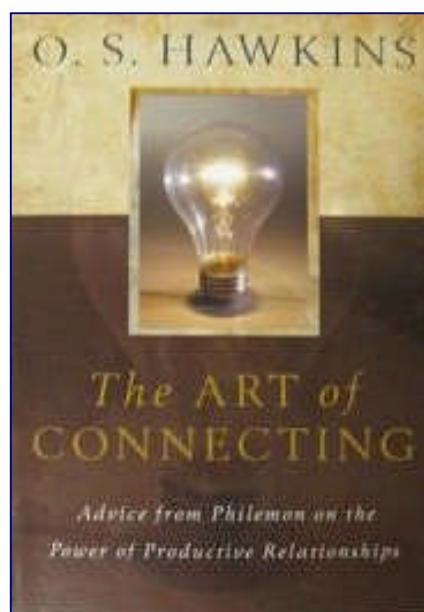
DEAN WELCH – TEACHER



WEEKLY SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON

SEPTEMBER 6, 2009

LESSON #1 FROM THE **MASTERWORK** SERIES STUDY OF:






SEPTEMBER 6, 2009

GETTING CONNECTED

WEEK #1 — PHILEMON 1-3

 If I have learned anything during my brief life on this planet, it's that people need people. Sounds like that should be the title of a song! The presence of people is essential—caring people, helpful people, interesting people, friendly people, thoughtful people. These folks take the *grind* out of life. About the time we are tempted to think we can handle things all alone—boom! We run into some obstacle and need help. We discover all over again that we are not nearly as self-sufficient as we thought. Yet, in spite of our high-tech world and efficient procedures, people remain the essential ingredient of life. When we forget that, a strange thing happens according to Dr. Charles Swindoll: "*We start treating people like **inconveniences** instead of **assets**.*"

That is precisely what Michael Douglas's character, President Andrew Shepherd, encountered one evening when he decided to stop by a local florist to buy some flowers in the movie *The American President*. You may recall this movie about a widower Chief Executive who falls for a lobbyist. Let's watch this scene and see what we're talking about: [\[PLAY CLIP FROM THE AMERICAN PRESIDENT, SCENE #22, "A FLORAL HOP OUT", FROM 1:13:25 TO 1:14:56\]](#)

Now there's a lady who's lost sight of the objective. I might question whether something like that ever happened if I had not experienced similar incidents in my own life. **What did you notice about the way the florist treated her customer? Why do you think she responded the way she did initially?** Just as Dr. Swindoll said, "*We start treating people like inconveniences instead of assets.*"

Today we begin a six-week Bible study by Dr. O. S. Hawkins from his book, *The Art of Connecting*. The subtitle of this study says this is "*advice from Philemon on the power of productive relationships.*" And just as you've learned this week in your study, "*Life itself is made up of relationships.*" Each new day

brings the need for constructive interpersonal relationships. No matter what your day holds, we need to learn how to properly relate to one another—but maybe not like the young florist in our movie clip.

In order to show you how everything is really connected in today's world, I want each of you to try a *simple-looking* puzzle. Take your Lesson Notes handout sheet and turn it over to the back side which is blank. Now, I want you to draw a dot in a circle like this (SHOW PICTURE)



—**with this rule:** you must draw the dot-circle picture **without** having the pen or pencil point leave the paper, and without erasing any intermediate lines. It can be done! This shows how everything is really connected though it may not first appear that way. [PUZZLE SOLUTION ATTACHED—DON'T SHOW UNTIL END]

This study over the next six weeks is based on the book of Philemon—which is amazing in and of itself in that it's really a simple letter written by Paul to a friend. I've handed out a copy of "*The Letter*" for your reference during this study and want to point out that it contains only twenty-two sentences in less than a dozen brief paragraphs. Yet, as Dr. Hawkins says, Paul's letter is the most articulate case study in the *Art of Connecting*, the building of positive, productive interpersonal relationships, to be found anywhere. Look at "*The Letter*" and let's read the first three verses and catch a glimpse of the importance of the relationship we will be studying over the next few weeks. Listen to **PHILEMON 1-3 (NIV)** as I read: *¹"Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, to Philemon our dear friend and fellow worker, ²to Apphia our sister, to Archippus our fellow soldier and to the church that meets in your home: ³Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."*

Notice how Paul starts his letter. Look at the beginning of one of Paul's other letters. How did he describe himself there? I

think it's important to point out that right off the bat, Paul describes himself as a prisoner of Christ Jesus. He does not begin any of his other letters with that description. In this letter, however, Paul chooses **not** to use his authority (cf. vv. 8-9), but rather to appeal gently and singularly to a friend. Look again at the words of **Philemon 1-2. What kind of relationship do you sense between the people mentioned in this verse? Does our relationship with each other affect our relationship with God?**

As I've prepared to teach this study, it seems that I've just been bombarded with reminder after reminder, as well as poignant examples, about the importance of relationships. Last weekend Beverly and I went to see a simple little movie called *Post Grad* just as an escape from the *hustle and bustle* of life. The movie is about a young girl finishing college and not being able to find a job and having to move back home. But the bottom-line principle of the movie was right on point for this study: "*What you do with your life is just half of the equation—more importantly is **WHO** you're with when you're doing it.*" I could just feel God reminding me about the importance of relationships in my life and how He uses people to grow my faith. **Simply put, relationships with people impact our faith in God.** And as we learn how to abide in Him more and more, we will also want to reach out to others and truly connect with them as part of the body of Christ.

Since relating to others is based on the ultimate relationship with Christ and abiding in Him, let's begin our scripture reading in **JOHN 15:4-5 (NIV):** ***4"Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. 5"I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.*** **What keeps us from abiding in Christ? What are the benefits to us of abiding in Christ?**

So, as we abide in Christ, we, in turn, will do what? Yes, bear much fruit—which means we have to be involved with people. We

must connect with others as Christ did. Remember how Jesus responded to the question by the Pharisee lawyer about the greatest commandment of all? [**MATTHEW 22: 37-39** "LOVE THE LORD YOU GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, WITH ALL YOUR SOUL AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND..." AND THE SECOND IS LIKE IT: "LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF."]

As we start this new study, we need to see right up front that Jesus reveals to us the secret to building positive and productive relationships in His response in those verses from Matthew. And guess where the responsibility lies? With you and me! Don't forget what Dr. Hawkins said in your study this week about you taking personal responsibility. I loved the comment he made about the word *responsibility* being made up from two words: **RESPONSE** and **ABILITY**. It's the ability to choose your response!

So, if this study is about the *art of connecting* and we know the importance of interpersonal relationships, we know that God has a plan for us in this study to re-focus on relationships and take personal responsibility for making a difference by being connected to Him as our Source. We are the hands and feet of Christ on this planet we call earth. I remember when I was a little boy my grandmother telling me something that was so simple—yet so profound—that goes along with this: **You can catch more flies with honey than with vinegar.** This means that it is easier to persuade people if you use polite arguments and flattery than if you are confrontational. Aren't we suppose to reflect the image of Christ to others? Life is about relationships.

So, by our abiding in Christ and reflecting His image to those around us, what happens? Let me give you an example of this in someone who actually took personal responsibility and made a difference in the lives of men who were not so loveable: **In 1921, Lewis Lawes became the warden at Sing Sing Prison. No prison was tougher than Sing Sing during that time. But when Warden Lawes retired some 20 years later, that prison had become a humanitarian institution. Those who studied the system said credit for the change belonged to Lawes. But when he was asked about the transformation, here's what he said: "I owe it all to my**

wonderful wife, Catherine, who is buried outside the prison walls.”

Catherine Lawes was a young mother with three small children when her husband became the warden. Everybody warned her from the beginning that she should never set foot inside the prison walls, but that didn't stop Catherine! When the first prison basketball game was held, she went.....walking into the gym with her three beautiful kids and she sat in the stands with the inmates. Her attitude was: “My husband and I are going to take care of these men and I believe they will take care of me! I don't have to worry!”

She insisted on getting acquainted with them and their records. She discovered one convicted murderer was blind so she paid him a visit. Holding his hand in hers she said, “Do you read Braille?” “What's Braille?” he asked. Then she taught him how to read. Years later he would weep in love for her. Later, Catherine found a deaf-mute in prison. She went to school to learn how to use sign language. Many said that Catherine Lawes was the body of Jesus that came alive again in Sing Sing from 1921 to 1937.

Then, she was killed in a car accident. The next morning Lewis Lawes didn't come to work, so the acting warden took his place. It seemed almost instantly that the prison knew something was wrong.

The following day, her body was resting in a casket in her home, three-quarters of a mile from the prison. As the acting warden took his early morning walk, he was shocked to see a large crowd of the toughest, hardest looking criminals gathered like a herd of animals at the main gate. He came closer and noted tears of grief and sadness. He knew how much they loved Catherine. He turned and faced the men, “All right, men, you can go. Just be sure and check in tonight!” The he opened the gate and a parade of criminals walked, without a guard, the three-quarters of a mile to stand in line to pay their final respects to Catherine Lawes. And every one of them checked back in. Every one!

Relationships! Expressing the love of Christ to others. WOW! Is that a picture of you? Then, what's our problem?

So, if it's about us working on relationships—we need to understand that there are only **three** in life. Based on your study this week, what are the three relationships? **Outward Expression (external)** which is the relationship we have in our home, work, social arena where we contact with others in interpersonal relationships. Then, there is an **Inward Expression (internal)** which is the relationship we have with ourselves. Some call it *self-worth*. And, finally there is the **Upward Expression (eternal)** which is an awesome thought. This is the ability to come into a relationship with God through the Lord Jesus in such a way that we can know Him in the intimacy of Father and child. And, as Dr. Hawkins says, the bottom line is: "*We will never be properly related to each other until we are properly related to ourselves.*" Much of what happens in our broken relationships outwardly is simply a projection of what is going on within us. Thus the truth is that we will never be properly related to ourselves until we come into relationship with God, and finding our self-worth in Him.

Hopefully, you've read the entire letter of Philemon and as we move through this study over the next six weeks, you will be able to see the **FIVE VITAL ELEMENTS** that Paul lists for interpersonal relationships. Each week we will talk about one of these five: **¹Affirmation of one another; ²Accommodation of one another; ³Acceptance of one another; ⁴Allegiance to one another; and ⁵Accountability to one another.** If you just think about how successful our churches would be today if we practiced those simple elements with each other.

So, what do we know about this letter and the players in the story? Who can summarize the story of the book of Philemon for us? Listen to what the *Life Application Bible Commentary* says: *Onesimus, a domestic slave, belonged to Philemon, a wealthy man and a member of the church in Colosse. Onesimus had run away from Philemon and had made his way to Rome, where he had met Paul, who apparently had led him*

to Christ (v. 10). Paul convinced Onesimus that running from his problems wouldn't solve them, and he persuaded Onesimus to return to his master. In Colossians 4:9, Paul regarded Onesimus as a trusted associate. Paul wrote this letter to Philemon to ask him to be reconciled to his runaway slave.

Have you ever written to a friend or spoken personally with him or her about paving the way to reconciliation between the friend and someone else? That's tough, isn't it? You know there is much on the market and on the bookstore shelves on building better relationships and restoring them. Scores of writers each have their own formulas and catchy slogan to motivate and sometime manipulate people into relationships. As we are about to learn in this study, apparently there is an *art of connecting* that we need to be reminded of.

David Jeremiah tells the importance of relationships in his catch phrase, "*it's always your turn.*" What he means is simple. So, let's take a moment and look at two sections of Scripture as we wrap us this introduction. First, turn to **MATTHEW 5: 23-24 (NKJV)** and follow along: *²³Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that **YOUR BROTHER** has something against you, ²⁴leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be **RECONCILED** to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.* That's pretty clear. If you know your brother has something against you, then what should you do? Yes, YOU GO and make it right. OK.

Now, turn over to **MARK 11:25-26 (NKJV)** and let's read that: *²⁵"And whenever you stand praying, if **YOU** have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses. ²⁶But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses."* What does this say? If YOU have something against your brother—guess what?—YOU must go and make it right again. See, it's always your turn!

There's hardly any stronger need than the need to belong, is there? We were created this way. We still quote the John Donne

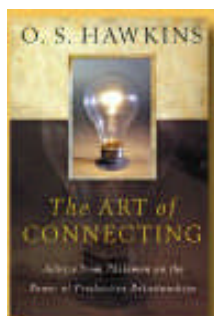
line that *"no man is an island unto himself."* We can even go back to the beginning—in the creation story—in **GENESIS 2:18 (NIV)**, which says, ***18**The LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him."*

We were made to be together. We often think only in terms of our own spiritual lives and forget the fact that God is saving a people to come together for His glory. Salvation is not just an individual matter; it's a group hug. It is when the church functions as a whole that we give evidence to who we really are—the **Body of Christ**. That's the Body of Christ, not the **"Individual of Christ."** No one of us can reflect, alone, who God made us to be. His will is expressed in all of us together.

Together we are the Bride of Christ. I am not the Bride; you are not the Bride. We are only the Bride in completion with all other believers in history and in the world. This is all part of God's plan to bring us back together where we can hear each other's heartbeat and experience the oneness that Jesus has with the Father. Jesus prayed that we would be all wrapped together in our oneness—us in Christ, and Christ in the Father.

So what does this mean for you and I today? It means we are not alone. We know where we belong. We need to give priority to our **relationships** with others because who we are depends on it. There is no such thing as individual spiritual growth. Check your calendar; arrange some lunches. Time put into other people is time committed to God and His purposes.

Let's Pray.



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SEPTEMBER 6, 2009

Point in a Circle - SOLUTION!!!

A sheet of paper. With a circle. With a dot in the middle. With the task: draw the dot-circle picture, without having the pen or pencil point leave the paper, and without erasing any intermediate lines.



Now, this one takes you a step further. To stretch your thinking in 3 rather than 2 dimensions of space. At some point in the future I'll have rendered diagrams or digital photos showing the process, but for now, grab pencil and paper and follow along with this description.

The key notion of the task is of course, 'without leaving the paper'. You comply with this by merely taking an edge of the paper and bring it curving over the front of the sheet until the edge rests down on the center of the pagefront. You draw a dot on the page front, just next to the edge of the folded paper, then immediately move the pencil point up onto the "back" of the page and out to where you want the circumference of the circle to be and come back down onto the front of the paper, completing the circle while unfolding the page. The scribing pen/pencil *never leaves contact with the paper (or one of its six 'surfaces')*.

This quirky little problem - in all its gamey simplicity - has a lot to teach us about the universe and "dimensionality". Space has connectivity with all parts of itself, and we realize that there may always not be a rigid structure to it. There is "form", yes, but primarily there are multitudes of pathways for getting from one location to another. Convention and habit may keep us on familiar territory - like always writing on one surface of a sheet of paper - but other options and possibilities are available when we examine the total structure of something. Bending the sheet of paper is like finding an additional dimensional region through which we can travel from one place to another, no longer confined to a flat 2D surface. We see with a different perspective now. There are indeed other options for information or energy transcription.

“The Letter”

A.D. 60

Dear Philemon,

Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, to Philemon our dear friend and fellow worker, to Apphia our sister, to Archippus our fellow soldier and to the church that meets in your home: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

I always thank my God as I remember you in my prayers, because I hear about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints. I pray that you may be active in sharing your faith, so that you will have a full understanding of every good thing we have in Christ. Your love has given me great joy and encouragement, because you, brother, have refreshed the hearts of the saints.

Therefore, although in Christ I could be bold and order you to do what you ought to do, yet I appeal to you on the basis of love. I then, as Paul—an old man and now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus— I appeal to you for my son Onesimus, who became my son while I was in chains. Formerly he was useless to you, but now he has become useful both to you and to me.

I am sending him—who is my very heart—back to you. I would have liked to keep him with me so that he could take your place in helping me while I am in chains for the gospel. But I did not want to do anything without your consent, so that any favor you do will be spontaneous and not forced. Perhaps the reason he was separated from you for a little while was that you might have him back for good— no longer as a slave, but better than a slave, as a dear brother. He is very dear to me but even dearer to you, both as a man and as a brother in the Lord.

So if you consider me a partner, welcome him as you would welcome me. If he has done you any wrong or owes you anything, charge it to me. I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand. I will pay it back—not to mention that you owe me your very self. I do wish, brother, that I may have some benefit from you in the Lord; refresh my heart in Christ. Confident of your obedience, I write to you, knowing that you will do even more than I ask.

And one thing more: Prepare a guest room for me, because I hope to be restored to you in answer to your prayers.

Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends you greetings. And so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas and Luke, my fellow workers. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

Sincerely,

Paul

[NIV]