

Week 6: Connecting

Title: **Have You Ever Felt the Need**

Key Scripture: **The man at the gate Beautiful – Acts 3:1–10 (NKJV used, unless otherwise marked)**

Daily Guide corresponding pages: **pp124–128**

Four points: **Caring by connecting. Engaging with felt needs. Connecting to the real needs.**

Sharing your gift of journey.

PowerPoint pointers are marked in this colour.

Introduction

Today is the sixth and last week of the series Paraclesis: Journeying Together. Our key verse for this series has been:

‘He comes alongside us when we go through hard times, and before you know it, he brings us alongside someone else who is going through hard times so that we can be there for that person just as God was there for us’ (2 Cor. 1:4, The Message).

To quickly recap, we have explored:

Caring – The good Samaritan – *parakaleo* – to encourage

Loving – The feeding of 5,000 – *paraklesis* ethos – culture

Journeying – The Emmaus Road disciples – *paraklesis* – to console

Living – The man by the pool of Bethesda – *parakaleo* – to exhort

Healing – The woman in the Temple – *parakaleo* – to comfort

This is the paraclesis journey we’ve been on, embracing it as a church to become a part of who we are as a church community. God calls us first to start this journey in the house of God, then He calls us to reach out from the house of God, taking paraclesis beyond these four walls to impact our community.

Our final paraclesis theme is ‘Connecting’: taking what God is doing among us, rejoicing in it, embracing its fullness, living in the good of it and taking it to the hurting, broken, needy neighbourhood around us. The title of our final message is ‘Have You Ever Felt the Need’.

Caring by connecting

‘Each one of us needs to look after the good of the people around us, asking ourselves, “How can I help?”’ (Rom. 15:2, The Message).

There is huge need around us and the challenge is: will we connect our journey with those needs, or as someone once put it, will we just remain preaching to the choir? Today we will be looking at the story of the man by the gate, Beautiful, which is found in **Acts 3:1–10**. It is an important account because previous narratives we’ve looked at are in the Gospels. In this account, Jesus has ascended to the Father, placing the task in the disciples’ hands.

Our final paracletic word is **‘to entreat’**. *‘And he was angry, and would not go in: therefore came his father out, and intreated [parakaleo] him’ (Luke 15:28, KJV).*

This verse comes from the story of the prodigal son who returns home to much rejoicing and great celebration. His older brother had been a loyal and faithful son, so is angry at the way the wayward brother is royally treated. He goes outside wanting nothing to do with it, so the father leaves the party and goes to ‘entreat’ him to come back in.

God wants us to entreat others outside the family of God as part of paracletic.

ENTREAT: To approach, reach out, connect, draw close and engage with others at the point of felt need; persuading and pleading.

Jesus gave the disciples three clear directives:

1. The Great Commission (Matt. 28:19–20)

The outwardly focused mission of church to ‘Go’ into all the world to preach the gospel to all nations. A broad vision to take the gospel to the world.

2. The Great Command (John 13:34; 15:12)

To love as we’ve been loved. Jesus said ‘as I have loved you, so you are to love others’. This was the ‘great’ eleventh commandment: Christ’s command to be a community of love – not an option or suggestion, but a command.

3. The Great Connection (John 20:21–22)

Before ascending to the Father, Jesus comes to His disciples and says, **‘As the Father has sent Me, I also send you’**. For three years He has journeyed together with His disciples, connecting with people’s lives. He’s spoken to them, touched them, healed them – changed

them. And the disciples have journeyed with Him and been part of His story. Now that Jesus is returning to the Father, He places responsibility into their hands. Not only is Jesus sending them but He promises that they will be empowered for the task. The Holy Spirit, the divine Enabler, will empower them. ***‘God’s Way is not a matter of mere talk; it’s an empowered life’ (1 Cor. 4:20, The Message).***

CARING BY CONNECTING: Recognising a felt need and deciding to intentionally engage with it, joining that person’s journey, understanding their story, reaching out and doing something about it to change their life.

Engaging with felt needs

‘I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper [parakletos], who will stay with you forever’ (John 14:16, GNB).

Some translations say ‘Comforter’. The word is ***parakletos*** and means ‘the one who comes alongside to help’. Jesus describes the Holy Spirit in this way four times. We saw that in Simeon’s dedication Jesus is the divine *paraklesis*. Now, returning to His Father, Jesus assures the disciples that another *parakletos* will be sent in His place to empower them. But empowered by the Holy Spirit for what?

Jesus said to wait in Jerusalem and ***‘you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me’ (Acts 1:8)***. Jesus gives the clue here as to why He sent the Holy Spirit: so that they would be empowered to be witnesses. In a court of law, if you’re called as a witness, you’re asked to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. What does a witness do in telling the truth?

They truthfully recount the details of the story and the circumstances under which it all happened. The advocate, the lawyer, then takes the story and presents it for judgment. They simply tell the truth by recounting the facts of their journey. That’s what God calls us to in *paraclesis*. Empowered by the Holy Spirit we tell our story, our gift of journey.

Jesus tells the disciples that He will send a divine Advocate who will come to enable and empower them to tell their story and share their journey with others. ***‘When He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth’ (John 16:13).***

When we come alongside others on their journey, sharing our story, the Holy Spirit comes with His gifts and His graces. That’s what His gifts and graces are for, to reveal Jesus through our story to others. So what does telling our story and sharing our journey mean?

Jesus engaged with people's felt needs

Take the story of the woman at the well (in **John 4**). She was there in the heat of the day, when all the other women wouldn't be there, because of her lifestyle. She was an outcast but Jesus came and sat at the well and entreated her. She came to the well for water, her felt need. What did Jesus talk about? Water. He connected at the point of her felt need.

- **The felt need is the conscious need [Fill in *Daily Guide*]**

The felt need is in the here and now, the present moment, the immediate need in front of us. We need to meet people just where they are on their journey, like the Good Samaritan did, and Jesus did with this woman. The question is, 'Have you ever felt the need of other people?' Enough to connect and care?

- **Jesus addressed felt needs [Fill in *Daily Guide*]**

Jesus connects with felt needs of the moment. With the feeding of the 5,000, it was their hunger. The Emmaus Road disciples had broken hearts. During a family crisis at a wedding in Cana, Jesus didn't take this as a good time to preach a sermon while waiting for more wine to come, He engaged at the point of felt need. We come across these kinds of needs every day in our lives. Whether it's a neighbour who needs the grass mowed or an acquaintance needing help with their groceries. Witnessing isn't inviting them to a special event or church meeting. It's just connecting in the ordinary things of life.

- **Felt need leads to real needs [Fill in *Daily Guide*]**

It wasn't long before Jesus was talking to the woman about her real thirst and the deep needs of her soul. Connecting at the point of felt need leads to an opportunity of getting to know someone's journey, understanding real needs. If we only relate to felt needs, we are no different to our secular counterparts or social agencies. Journeying is reaching out to the felt need, which leads to the real need, and that need can only be fully met in the person of Jesus Christ.

Connecting to the real needs

To look further at felt needs and real needs, let's pick up our key story for today. It begins: **'Now Peter and John went up together to the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth hour' (Acts 3:1)**. They're on the way to the 3pm church prayer meeting when they come across a paralysed beggar at the entrance gate into the Temple.

Understanding his story

This man had a chronic condition: ***‘a certain man lame from his mother’s womb’ (Acts 3:2)***. For over forty years he had suffered severe disability from a congenital disease. From birth he’d been unable stand or walk. His disability was bad enough, but something worse was going on too. **The beggar was:**

Marginalised by religion [Fill in *Daily Guide*]

‘whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms from those who entered the temple’ (Acts 3:2).

Levitical law and Rabbinical tradition required that disabled or paralysed persons could not enter the Temple, God’s house. Religion and his deformity meant the man remained outside the Temple gate, which separated the outer and inner court. The closest he got was the gate; no one could get him beyond it. Even the religious people couldn’t help him get in. Marginalised by those who should have cared, he lay on the wrong side of the gate into God’s house.

However, He knew that by laying there, people going into the Temple would see his condition. He knew Temple people wanted to please God before going into His presence with an act of kindness or righteousness – giving alms. Almsgiving was recognised as an outward display and act of righteousness. He simply manipulated and exploited their religion, and they just fed his poverty. They gave him money, because it served their purposes: it made them feel good. Sometimes we can do that in church. **‘Lord, I won’t go but here’s the money to send someone else.’** But God says, how about putting your hand to the plough and getting your hands dirty? Your involvement is part of the solution.

Dependent on others [Fill in *Daily Guide*]

A beggar represented one of the lowest ‘have not’s in society, with no dignity, self-respect or self-worth, despised and pitied. He begged because he had little choice. He had no education, nothing he could put his hand to, and there were no social services or disability allowance. He was completely dependent on others.

His felt need was money. That’s when Peter and John arrived. These men were in the new kingdom, a new era. They’d journeyed with Jesus and seen Him connect at the point of felt need, then real need. They saw this man’s felt need. For them it was:

A day of opportunity

It was an opportunity to connect with a needy man who had been, for all too long, kept outside the gates of church. They weren't your average Temple-goers. Peter and John had journeyed with Jesus for three years. **Peter and John were connected:**

To a caring community [Fill in Daily Guide]

'all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need' (Acts 2:44–45).

They'd put all they had in a common pool. That's what community means, everything given over for the common good of others. Peter and John now had nothing except Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit. They come to this man whose felt need is money, knowing that they haven't got what it takes to meet his felt need. Other Temple goers threw a shekel or two at the problem but Peter and John belonged to a grace and truth community that recognised people don't have problems, but needs.

With the paralysed man [Fill in Daily Guide]

'And fixing their eyes on him, [they] said, "look at us"' (Acts 3:4) – they 'looked him straight in the eye' (The Message).

There was good eye-to-eye contact; ***'fixing their eyes'*** means looking beyond a quick fix of a shekel or two. They saw into the window of his soul, the deep pain, hurt and rejection reflected in his eyes. They looked at him with their eyes of compassion, love, grace and truth. This man had seen so many eyes of disdain, contempt, pity and humiliation as passers-by threw their guilt money at him to appease their own consciences. But not these two men – they 'entreated' him, with eyes of warmth, understanding and encouragement. And they see beyond the need for alms to his real need: to get him from outside the gate to inside the gate, into God's presence. They knew money wouldn't help him, it would only feed his poverty keeping him in the same old holding pattern outside the gate.

With his felt need [Fill in Daily Guide]

'So he gave them his attention, expecting to receive something from them' (Acts 3:5).

Peter and John looked him straight in the eye. Now, you might think that when someone isn't offering any money, the beggar might look beyond them to the next person, the next client, the next target, so that they can get some more money. But we see that he didn't look beyond them. Something about them arrested his attention and engaged him. He looks at them with full attention. They convey hope but his expectation is only to receive 'something'.

To his real need [Fill in Daily Guide]

‘Then Peter said, “Silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk.”’ (Acts 3:6).

Thank God for social involvement, but let’s be clear, the gospel is not a social gospel. Social is the point of connect, the felt need. The deep hunger and longing of the human soul for spiritual reality is the real need. We have a journey that says spiritual reality for us has been found in Jesus. Maybe your business has gone bust, your kids went off the rails, your son is a drug addict or your family fell apart, but in the midst of it all, the spiritual reality has been that the anchor for your soul is found in Jesus Christ. Peter and John knew the thing the beggar longed for most, which he had been denied for so long, was the ability to walk on healthy feet – to go through the gate into God’s presence.

Sharing your gift of journey

Peter and John were willing to make available to God what they did have. Of course, they didn’t have much. In the **King James Version**, Peter says, ***‘such as I have give I thee’ (Acts 3:6)***. Obviously they didn’t have money to give; it had all been given to church. But they freely gave their ‘such as I have’.

What Peter and John did have was their journey with Jesus and all that Jesus had poured into them: their presence, their compassion, their hope. Remember this is Peter the denier, who denied knowing this man from Galilee, but something had happened on his journey, transforming him. He could now say with John, ‘such as I have I give you’.

Wow, what a word! As we come to the close of this series, I want to ask you what is your ‘such’?

It is your gift of journey, your life experience, what God has been to you, what He has done for you. Bring it to God and say, ‘This is my “such”’. It may not seem much, like the boy with the loaves and fishes, or the widow with the mite, or Mary with the alabaster box. Maybe it’s not a lot but it is *your* ‘such’. Let Him take it, connect it with someone’s felt need and use you as an instrument of grace and truth.

[Give a personal example or illustration of connecting at the point of felt need, or of others who connected at the point of felt need. Suggest that members of the congregation identify a life experience that could be a point of journey connection.]

[At this point you could ask the congregation to fill in their journey cards (for more information, visit www.paraclesis.org.uk)]

Don't look at what you don't have [Fill in Daily Guide]

Peter and John didn't let what they didn't have (in this case, money) stop them from reaching out with what they did have. Don't let the fear of what you don't have stop you from connecting to others. They didn't have cash, but they had 'such'. Their lives were not dictated by their limitations. Stop looking at your limitations and embrace your resource.

Realise what you do have [Fill in Daily Guide]

Recognise your 'such', your gift of journey, your experience, and the grace and truth that has become part of your life. When you close in on that, your own lack of ability, confidence, experience, money, education and so on disappears. Your lack doesn't stop you passing on your gift to others.

Embrace it with certainty [Fill in Daily Guide]

God has given you this gift to give away to someone else. Peter and John had certainty about what they did have. When we have certainty about what we do have, we are not limited by what we don't have and when we make it available to God, He multiplies it.

You have a story to tell [Fill in Daily Guide]

Your greatest liability becomes your greatest asset in God's hands as you journey with others. Your mess becomes your message and your test becomes your testimony. Your journey becomes your priceless gift to others.

Empowered in Jesus' name

'In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk' (Acts 3:6). It is that name that is above every name, that name to which one day every knee will bow. My prayer is that you come to the realisation that you are part of God's plan in this day and age. That He can take whatever has gone into your life. It does not matter how low you have sunk or how high you have risen, God will take it and use it in the name of Jesus Christ.

So let's conclude with Peter and John's final actions in this healing:

- **They gave him a hand up not a hand-out**

'[They] took him by the right hand and lifted him up, and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength. So he, leaping up, stood and walked and entered the temple with them—walking, leaping and praising God' (Acts 3:7–8).

They reached out, took hold of his hand, gave what they had, made the connection and lifted him to his feet. At that moment, something flowed from them to him: supernatural strength, power, healing and deliverance. Instantly he felt it in his feet, ankles and legs.

Never again would he be carried to the Temple gate. Far better than a few shekels in his hand! The name of Jesus always lifts people up and sets them on their journey again.

- **They grasped the connecting opportunity**

Every day we have opportunities like Peter and John. We can wake up with excitement and joy because today we can reach out and help someone to stand up and get going on their journey again with new hope. They grasped their connecting opportunity with both hands. This was the new order in the new kingdom – empowered to journey together with others.

- **They engaged in journey evangelism**

Peter and John took the opportunity that day when everyone else walked by and threw their shekels. But they said, today we are going to ‘paraclesis’, to ‘entreat’ this man, and he was drawn to them. ***‘And all the people saw him walking and praising God. Then they knew that it was he who sat begging alms at the Beautiful Gate of the temple; and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him’ (Acts 3:9–10).***

This is how the book of Acts began and we are the continuation of that journey. To the questions: **Who Cares? Do You Care?** they responded: **We Care!** Now it’s over to you.

PARACLESIS SERIES CONCLUSION

It is recommended to finish the series with Communion/Eucharist. Having given out the **journey cards** midway through the message (inviting the congregation to fill theirs in while you are talking about ‘our such’), a drop box can be put near the Communion table for them to drop in their journeying cards when they take Communion. It is also recommended you put a piece of coloured ribbon (approx. 18” long) on each seat before the service. At the close of your message, invite the church to take the ribbon and hold it in front of them to represent their life span. Ask them to tie a knot in the ribbon to signify their age point on the life span and represent how much of the journey they have travelled and how much they have left. Place a cross at the front of the church, near the Communion table perhaps, and invite them to commit their journeys afresh to the Lord by hanging their knotted ribbon on the cross bar of the cross (after they have taken Communion and placed their card in the box provided). The ribbons will serve as a visual representation of the many journeys travelled within the church.

For further reading, see chapters 10, 11 and 12 of *Love with Skin On*, Trevor J. Partridge (Farnham: CWR, 2016).

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