

SERIES: UNSHAKABLE HOPE
PART 4: YOU'VE GOT TO GET CONNECTED

An important part of developing an unshakable hope is to get connected and grounded in the local church. I don't know where I would be today if it wasn't for my deep connections to the local church. I have been in the local church since I was born. Would you look at your notes and look at Romans 12:5: **“Even though we are many individuals, Christ makes us one body and individuals who are connected to each other.”** I want you to circle the word “connected.” Church is not an event you attend. It is a family you belong to. It is a relationship you're connected with. It is a group you are a part of. We are connected to each other. God wants you to understand the significance of connecting with other believers so much that He gives us four metaphors in Scripture of what a church is like in being connected to other members of the church. He gives us four metaphors that demonstrate our membership in the body of Christ. He says it's like being a brick in God's temple. It's like being a part of a human body. It's like being connected to a fruit tree or to a vine. And it's like being a family member of a family. Each of these four metaphors have profound influence and impact when you understand what it means to be connected that deeply to God's local church.

Connecting to other believers in a church family is like no other connection on this earth you will have. No other relationship is going to last forever. You might get married, but your marriage doesn't last forever. You might have a physical family, but your family won't last forever. You might have relationships with a business, but that won't last forever. There's only one relationship on planet earth you can have that's going to last forever, and that is being a member of God's family. Being a part of His body. Being a part of His church. The local church offers you four things in a relationship you can't get anywhere else on the planet. I want us to look at these four metaphors--these four word pictures from God's Word so you see what that means. Please write these down in your notes. First, what happens when I join a church family? When I become a member of a church?

I. It connects me to God's eternal temple.

This is a leading metaphor that the Bible uses for the church. God is building a spiritual temple. It's a living temple not made of bricks and mortar but of people. It is a lasting temple. Let me read some verses from Scripture, and then I'll comment on them. 1 Corinthians 3:16 says, **“Don't you realize that all of you together are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God lives in you?”** Ephesians 2:19c & 21-22, **“You are members of God's family.... 21 We are carefully joined together in Him, becoming a holy temple for the Lord. 22 And in Christ, you are being built together to become a dwelling place in which God lives by His Spirit.”** In all three of these verses there is one word that is repeated three times. Would you circle the word “together” in your notes? Together, together, together. Please hear me, friends--this is something you cannot do on your own. You can only do it in community. You can only do it in connection. You can only do it in relationship of being connect to God's church. You must be connected to His church. We become the temple of God inhabited by His Holy Spirit together. Paul says in Ephesians 2:21 that we're carefully joined together. We are being built together as a dwelling place in which God lives by His Holy Spirit. This is exactly what I want to clarify: the difference in being an attender and a member. They're not the same things. The difference between an attender and a member is the word commitment. When someone says to me, “Hey, Pastor Scott, I love your church.” I know they're not a member and their not very committed. When a person says to me “Hey, Pastor Scott, I love our church.” Now I know they truly belong. It's their church. It's not my church. It's our family. It's our flock. It's our church. The difference between an attender and a member is the difference between living together and getting married. It's commitment. An attender comes to an event. A member belongs to a family. It's the difference between believing and belonging. Hear me, loved ones: God has called you to not simply believe, but He's called you to belong to the family of God. You become a Christian by committing yourself to Jesus Christ. But you become a member of a local church family by committing yourself to other believers. And you say, “That's going to be my family. That's going to be my spiritual home. That's going to be my place.”

People will often ask me where the idea of membership is found in the Bible. We just read it in Ephesians 2:19. "You are members of God's family." In the four metaphors we're looking at today they all speak of being a member of a local church so that you can be counted on and loved and that you have a deep sense of belonging. Why would God choose a temple metaphor to illustrate what He wants His church to be? Because in a building all of the parts are connected. The purpose of their connection is for the purpose to support and hold each other up. This is the first purpose of a local church family. We are connected to hold each other up. We're connected to provide strength and stability.

Paul writes in 1 Timothy 3:15 "**I want you to know how people must conduct themselves in the household of God. This is the church of the living God, which is the pillar and foundation of the truth.**" The church is the protector and the helper in the proclamation of the gospel, and how we conduct ourselves is incredibly important. Pillars are for support of the temple and the foundation is for stability. What is the first benefit of being connected to a local church?

The BENEFIT: Stability and support

Please write this in your notes. You're not meant to go through life disconnected or without support and stability. You need other people in your life who stabilize your spiritual growth and who support your spiritual growth. Until you get connected to a church family and you belong you don't have the pillar and foundation. You don't have the strength and support and stability that you need. You need spiritual, emotional, relational, physical, and mental support. The best place to get that is in your local church and especially in a small group. So the first picture of what it means to be a member and not just an attender in a local church is the church as God's eternal temple, because we're all connected and the connection gives us support, stability and strength. Being a member in a local church...

II. It connects me to Christ's body.

This is another leading metaphor in the Bible that speaks of God's church as Christ's body. Would you please read our loud with me Ephesians 1:22-23 **"God has put everything under the authority of Christ, and God gave Him this authority for the benefit of His church, which is the body of Christ."** Ephesians 4:25 says, **"So stop telling lies. Let us tell our neighbors the truth, for we are all parts of the same body."** Romans 12:4-5, **"Just as our bodies have many parts and each part has a special function, 5 so it is with Christ's body. We are many parts of one body, and we all belong to each other."** First Paul tells us that God has given Jesus His authority for the benefit of His church. We're taught not to lie or be arrogant or gossip and slander each other because we are Christ's body here on earth and we belong to each other. In Romans 12 Paul points out that Christ has many different parts of the body. We're all different and unique. Just look down your row. There's no one like you. God loves diversity. He loves every color, every shape, every size, every background and every language group. God says every one of us is needed to make His body complete. You might say I'm not needed. Yes, you are, loved ones. When you don't engage in our purpose and our goals and values we miss you. We're missing what Jesus has placed in you to give to each one of us. We all have a different role to play in this local church, Christ's body. Paul says in Colossians 2:18-19 **"Don't let anyone condemn you by insisting on pious self-denial or the worship of angels, saying they have had visions about these things. Their sinful minds have made them proud, 19 and they are not connected to Christ, the head of the body. For He holds the whole body together with its joints and ligaments, and it grows as God nourishes it."** Paul was speaking about false teachers who said they were mature because of their pious self-denial and the visions of angels they had seen, but Paul said their sinful minds have disconnected them from Christ who is the head of His body. It is Jesus who knows who truly is His body, and He nourished it and causes it to grow as we're connected to Him and to each other. Paul is saying that our connections to Jesus and to each other are the essence of life. Your body's organs, muscles, and bones have no value at all if they're disconnected. Hear me, please. You only grow in your relationship with Jesus by being connected to Christ's body in a local church. In America we've been taught many other things than that. Many people think, "I don't need the church." They have been hurt, and they're angry and

resentful. “It’s just me and Jesus. Me and Jesus. Me and my Bible. That’s all I need.” Hear me, that is impossible. You cannot grow in your relationship with Jesus disconnected from the body, the local church. You have no support system. You only grow as you are connected to Jesus and to His body. You’ll wither if you’re not connected. Connections are what keep us growing. You need other people in your life. You need the support of a small group of friends who want to grow. You need to hear God’s Word taught in a practical and relevant way where people model what they teach.

The BENEFIT: I get life and growth

By being a part of God’s temple you get support and stability. By being a part of the body of Christ you get life and growth. These are things I get by being connected. The third metaphor the Bible uses is an organic picture of the church as a fruit tree. The church as a grapevine. The church as a plant. It’s used many times in Scriptures.

III. It connects me to the power of Jesus.

When I join a church family it connects me to the power of Jesus. I move from attender to member. I move to a position of belonging. Jesus said in John 15:4-5 **“Remain in Me, and I will remain in you. For a branch cannot produce fruit if it is severed from the vine, and you cannot be fruitful unless you remain in Me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in Me and I with them, will produce much fruit. For apart from Me you can do nothing.”** Would you please circle the word “nothing” on your notes. To bear fruit you must be connected to Jesus and to His church. When you’re connected to Jesus and His church you will bear fruit. When you’re disconnected you will not bear good fruit; you will bear rotten fruit. Jesus says it is being connected to Him and to each other that empowers us. His power flows through connectedness. You know this is true in every area of your life. A disconnected toaster has no heat. A disconnected music component cannot play music. A disconnected computer can’t connect with the internet. The same is true in your spiritual life. If you’re disconnected from God, disconnected from the body of Christ, disconnected from

the family of God, if you're disconnected you lose your warmth. You lose your power. You lose your direction and your ability to move forward. In vs. 5 please circle the word "produce." It is our connections that make us the most productive. If you have good strong relationships, you'll have a productive life. If you have weak relationships, you'll have a weak life. Your life's impact will largely be determined by the connections you make. And the greatest, the most important ones, are those you make in the church. Jesus says a branch cannot produce fruit by itself; it has to stay connected to the vine. Jesus refers to Himself in this passage as the vine but it also refers to His people, the body of Christ, those in the local church.

We all know that the life of the grape is in the vine. You never see grapes just hanging out there on thin air. Detached grapes? There's a word for that--they're called raisins. They have no life in them. They shrivel up and they die. If you're going to have plump luscious, fruitful grapes they've got to stay connected to the vine. The fruit comes from the root. If you're not connected spiritually to this third metaphor of the church you will have no fruit in your life. You could dry up and wither. Many so-called Christians do. What kind of fruit do I produce when I'm connected not just to the temple of God, the body of Christ, but to the true vine? Galatians 5:22-23 tell us. Please read this out loud with me. **"But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, and self-control."** The only way you have this kind of fruit is by being connected to Jesus and to His people, the body of Christ, the local church. Why? Have you noticed that every one of these fruits are relational? You can't have love by yourself. You have to be in relationship to experience love. You learn patience from relationships. You learn peace in struggling through in your relationships. You learn gentleness in your relationships. You learn faithfulness in your relationships. None of these fruits can you learn and grow on your own. Not one of them. They're all a matter of being connected in relationships that you don't give up on. What's the benefit of being connected to Jesus and His church?

The BENEFIT: I get God's power to change

Please listen to me, loved friends. There are some things in your personality; some defects that you will never be able to change on your effort no matter how determined you are to see them changed. There are some problems in your life that the only way you will be able to grow through them is in community. By being connected in a small group. Having other people encouraging you, praying for you, helping you, supporting you, and holding you accountable. That's the value of Celebrate Recovery. It's the value of all of our small groups. It's the stubborn things in my life that I want to change, but I can't. God wired you in a way that you don't get well on your own. We need each other. We only get healed through community. Through relationships. Through connection. And some of these problems are so big you need the help of others, the prayer of others, the accountability of others and their support. That's the 3rd thing you get. The local church connects you to the power of Jesus to change and become a change agent for others.

IV. It connects me to God's family.

You can't get that anywhere else. You can't get a connection to God's family at your business or to God's family at a school. When you connect to God's family then you become a part of a giant family of God that's been around for thousands of years. **A Christian without a local church family is a spiritual orphan.** When you're born you automatically become part of the human race. When I was born, I didn't have any choice. I automatically became part of the human race. But I didn't become part of a family until someone decided to take me home from the hospital. Fortunately it was my mom and dad. Someone who takes you in as a baby. They became your family. What a baby needs more than anything else is a family. And when you become a Christian, when you step across that line, when you put your faith in Christ and you become a believer in Jesus Christ, what you need more than anything else--hear me, church--is not a Bible study, it's not prayer. What you need more than anything else is a spiritual family. You need a church family to take care of you and help you grow, and then you'll learn all the other things, the habits and the tools and the spiritual disciplines and the spiritual formation and all the other things you need to grow. But it begins with personal, intimate relationships. Romans 8:16 says, **"For His Spirit joins with our spirit to**

affirm that we are God's children." That means we become brothers and sisters to each other. Colossians 3:14 says, **"Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds us all together in perfect harmony."** We have to be taught how to live as members in God's family. There's some family assignments. There's some family responsibilities. There's some family benefits, family values, rules and guidelines. Paul writes, "I want you to know how people, who are members of God's family must live. God's family is the church.

We have a four hour seminar on this very thing that will be taught at least 10 months out of the 12 in 2017. **We will start a new rhythm in January. The 2nd Sunday of every month we will hold what we call Meet The Pastors. The 3rd week of every month I will offer our LD 101 which is our discovering your spiritual family seminar. It's our membership seminar. On the 4th week of every month we will baptize those who need to be baptized.** I am very excited about developing this new rhythm here at CVCHURCH. Some of you have been attending CVCHURCH for months, maybe even years and you've never taken our LD 101 seminar. Why not? Why not make the big step from attender to member? From believer to belonging. From consumer to contributor? From spectator to participator? Once you take LD 101 and you sign our Membership covenant do you know what becomes your number one responsibility here at CVCHURCH? It is to love all of the other members. That's what God says. Your first and foremost responsibility is to love the other members. What is the benefit?

The BENEFIT: I'm loved, and I'm accepted

The bottom line is that life is all about the quality connections you make in life. If you're disconnected you're missing out on a whole lot of love. As we close this morning (afternoon) I want you to look at the first verse on the top of your notes about two kinds of commitments and he says this, "First they gave themselves to the Lord; and then, by God's will they gave themselves to us as well." At CVCHURCH we call these the first base commitments because of our baseball diagram. The first base commitments are where you commit yourself to Jesus Christ and to His church family here at CVCHURCH. You become a Christian by committing yourself to Jesus. You become a church member by committing

yourself to a group of people and say, "That's going to be my spiritual home." To say I love Jesus, but I don't like the church is to say I love that Jesus, but I can't stand His body. The church is the body of Christ. What if I said to you I like you but I don't like your spouse? You'd be offended. And God is offended when you say that about His body, His bride, His family, His flock, His temple, His vine. God says membership is not automatic. First they gave themselves to the Lord and then they gave themselves to us.

Our next MTP will be on 12-11-2016 at 1:45 p.m. and will be over by 3:15p.m. We have our exciting EXPLORE BETHLEHEM from 5:00 to 7:00 on the 11th. It will be a packed day. Then we have three services on Christmas Eve, Saturday the 24th, 2:30p.m.; 4:00p.m. and 5:30p.m. Our next LD 101, our membership seminar, will be held on the 3rd Sunday of January on the 15th. If you would like to join me for this exciting seminar please sign up now on your connection card and hand it in to an usher or place it in the offering or you can place it in our Communication centers in the foyer. We have two of them.

Let's pray. Father I look out on these people that I love so much, and I see people who've been members here for a year, five years, ten years and some for over 20 years. All that we have been through. The ups and downs. The highs and lows. Good and bad. And God, You have made an impact on our world that none of us could have done on our own. I thank You for the productivity and the fruitfulness that increases when we're a part of Your vine. And I thank You for the love and acceptance we get when we belong to Your family. And I pray that those who are on the edge would move from attender to member and make that decision today. Father, for those who have never invited Jesus Christ into their life may they do so right now. I pray that they will open their heart and say, "Jesus Christ, make Yourself real to me. I want to learn to love You and trust You and serve You all of my life." I pray that they would step across that line today. I pray this blessing in Your precious name Jesus.