


*Connecting to God.
Connecting to each other.* 

[Connecting Points](#) helps church leaders understand the principles of connecting and offers tools needed to implement this ministry into the local church. Steve Lambert and Randy Helms, the developers and founders of Connecting Points are both Assemblies of God pastors. With over sixty years of pastoral experience between them, both Steve and Randy are long time practitioners who understand the challenges and demands faced by the church in an ever-changing culture. The following is condensed from Chapter 4 of their book and is excerpted by permission for the Commission on Discipleship website. This chapter discusses the role of relationships in both the pre-conversion and post conversion stages of discipleship.

Connecting Points

by Steve Lambert and Randy Helms

Chapter 4: The Premise

When we are looking for role models for making disciples there is no need to look any further than Jesus. What was it that made Jesus such a compelling leader of those men? There is a characteristic that stands out when we observe His connection to the disciples. Jesus built great relationships with the disciples. He spent time with them, He listened to their questions, He ate with them, He got to know their families, and of course He taught them. Jesus became the compass for these disciples, and we believe that a major reason for it was that Jesus was intentionally relational. The *premise* of Connecting Points is *there can be no discipleship without relationship*.

As we look at Jesus' building relationships we may conclude it is time consuming; requires an intentional willingness to see where people can be and not just where they are now; and at times can just be messy. Jesus looked into the eyes of rough fisherman and saw they could become apostles. We must be willing to do the same thing. We must look around us and see those people who can shine like stars if someone is willing to invest in them.

The point is we should connect with one another, and we should bear one another's burdens because Jesus has chosen to do that with us. When we read the Gospels we see how often the disciples blew it, fell short, let Jesus down, showed little faith, and Jesus still connected with them. He still found reason to disciple them and keep them in the circle. At times they all showed faithlessness, but Jesus kept His relationship with His disciples. His kindness should be a catalyst, a motivation, to reach out to one another in kindness. It is the responsibility of every Christian to build strong relationships with other Christians and pre-Christians.

When Jesus was ready to leave this world, He left instruction with His disciples. In Matthew 28:19-20, He said "... go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you" (NLT). Jesus basically told his disciples: *I want you to be with people everywhere. Go the ends of the earth and build relationships with people so that you may give to them the teachings I have given to you.*

This is a statement basic to Christianity; however, it seems that our emphasis concerning discipleship is related to believers. We understand that in order to disciple believers we must have relationship with them. But what about pre-Christians? Shouldn't we build relationships with them to allow the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer to affect their lives? Remember that Jesus started discipling His men before they ever connected with God personally. Jesus said make disciples of all people.

Again, our premise is that *there is no discipleship without relationship*. That means that we must build relationships

with everyone we are called to disciple. We must build relationships with believers and pre-Christians who we intended to impact for the sake of the Gospel. Try giving spiritual instruction to the next stranger you meet and see how well that goes, or for that matter, just walk across to the other side of the church where all those other people sit and share a little direction with them. The badge of discipler is earned through relationship. Without relationship we have no license to lead others, and they have no responsibility to respond. We respond to instruction and counsel from those who, through relationship, we have given the right to do so.

Several years ago, James Engel developed what is now called the Engel Scale of Conversion Stages. We have adapted this scale to help us understand the process that the Holy Spirit uses to bring people to a point of decision. Let's relate the premise, *there is no discipleship without relationship*, to a graph we will call the Spiritual Life Continuum.

-5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4 +5

Every person on the planet can fit into this graph. A **minus five** would be an individual with the strongest resistance to the Gospel, an atheist. As you move along toward the lower negative numbers the resistance to the Gospel lessens. A **minus one** has almost no resistance and is ready to be confronted with making a decision. **Zero** is the cross and conversion takes place. A **plus two** is a young believer that is growing in faith and a **plus five** is a mature believer. Dr. Mike Rakes, Vice President at Southeastern University in Lakeland, Florida, breaks the scale down like this:

Minus Five

- An atheist or agnostic
- Sees no point in any kind of spirituality
- Only believes in the here and now
- What one can see is the only reality
- No awareness of God and doesn't desire one

Minus Four

- Never had any kind of personal witness
- Probably has only been in a church setting during a wedding or a funeral
- Sees Jesus as irrelevant to their lives
- Thinks of religion as a separate thing from spirituality

Minus Three

- Shows a lack of awareness of a personal God
- Skeptical about the Church and Jesus
- Sees Christianity as just another religion
- Not comfortable in a church setting

Minus Two

- Open to the idea of God and spirituality
- Attends church occasionally
- Views a Christ-centered Christianity as distant from where they are
- Believes Christianity is one of many ways to experience spirituality

Minus One

- Very open and close to making a decision to follow Christ
- Have an intellectual understanding of what they need to do to accept Christ
- Attending church more frequently
- Not sure if they are ready or able to be a Christian

Zero

- Someone who has just come to faith in Jesus Christ

Plus One

- Happy to be "Alive" in Christ
- Easily discouraged and might tend to confuse their emotions with spirituality
- May see themselves as more advanced in their faith than they really are
- Attends church at every opportunity

Plus Two

- A spiritual adolescent
- Outspoken about their faith, dealing with emotional issues from the past
- Struggling with various sins during the maturing process
- Personal sinfulness will exist outside their own awareness

Plus Three

- Emerging as a leader and growing in Christ
- Have had several significant heart movements toward Christ
- Visible flaws but are moving toward maturity
- Suffering serves to deepen their faith and bring humility to the soul

Plus Four

- Leads some type of group, whether official or unofficial
- Has followers who look to them as an example of Christianity
- Strong Christian character is their trademark
- Words carry a great deal of weight when it comes to spiritual things

Plus Five

- A passionate servant leader fully devoted to following Christ
- Fully assimilated into a core group of believers
- Involved in ministering to others
- Weathered various storms of life and has a deepened faith

It has been our tradition to celebrate when people arrived at **zero**. We have taught life begins at the cross. This is true as it relates to coming to faith, but we need to realize there is a whole lot of living going on down the negative side of the scale and an enormous explosion of life after the cross. Why would we reserve our celebration just for the conversion moment? Life is a journey and if through relational discipleship we can take a **minus five** atheist and help him along to a **minus two** who is now open to talk about Christ and believes there is a God, isn't that the work of the Holy Spirit and deserving of our praise and celebration? Jesus said disciple all people. That includes **minus fours** and **plus threes**.

Discipleship before conversion centers around social activities or mutual interests. Discipleship after conversion takes on a different look, but all discipleship is based on relationship. Ministry should be designed to facilitate discipleship on both sides of **zero**. Relational discipleship brings people to the place where the conviction of the Holy Spirit can be effective and conversion takes place. After conversion the same relational atmosphere facilitates the work of the Spirit to build and strengthen lives. The continuum should always be moving up. Just as Jesus is the model for relational discipleship, Connecting Points is committed to its premise: *there is no discipleship without relationship*.