

Dear Friends,

A key Methodist work is 'connection'. Indeed, the denomination is often referred to as the Connexion, the meaning of which is far bigger than simply what goes on within the Connexional Team. Connexion encompasses all of us who are related in some way to Methodist Conference such as through our membership of a circuit or, for ministers, through being received into Full Connexion.

If the lockdowns taught us anything they taught us that human connection is vital, because we are social animals. One study suggests that for some people, the lockdowns have caused the equivalent of six years of cognitive ageing to occur in a much shorter time.

The Christian faith has connection at its heart. The early church stressed koinonia (fellowship) and Jesus came in order to open the way to a new intimate connection with God. John Wesley taught that perfect love defines holiness. St Paul taught that extreme sacrifice is meaningless without love.

A writer I greatly enjoy is John Ortburg. In his book, 'I'd like you more if you were more like me', he discusses the interplay of love and intimacy. We can love someone but neglect our relationship with them through unreasonable busyness. A close relationship requires time to build shared memories, rituals (traditions) and trust.

Hilary & I both went (at different times) to a training college that gave a name to every cohort. One cohort was designated, 'Companions of Christ'. Much thought was given to the text, '*He appointed twelve that they might be with Him*' (Mark 3:14). This is the essence of our calling – to be in relationship with God through Jesus Christ. Jesus called His disciples by saying 'Follow me'. He could have said worship me, obey me, believe certain things about me, preach about me. But He actually said, 'Follow me'.

Ortburg itemised the things Jesus did with His disciples. They did a lot of walking together. They ate together. They learned together. They served one another. They rested and prayed together. They went for boat rides together. They went fishing together. That is a lot of time spent together!

To nurture our relationships with each other require time spent together. To nurture our relationship with God through Jesus Christ requires Holy Habits otherwise known as spiritual disciplines. As Ortburg puts it, 'Because God is always present, intimacy with Him is possible every moment of our lives. He's already here. We just have to show up and spend time with Him.'

God bless you,

Keith

Keith C. Beckingham

Superintendent Minister.