

Connecting
Like
Jesus

Practices for Healing,
Teaching, and Preaching

TONY CAMPOLO and
MARY ALBERT DARLING



First published in Great Britain in 2012

Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge
36 Causton Street
London SW1P 4ST
www.spckpublishing.co.uk

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British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 978-0-281-06915-6
eBook ISBN 978-0-281-06916-3

First printed in Great Britain by MPG Books
Subsequently digitally printed in Great Britain

eBook by Graphicraft Limited, Hong Kong

Produced on paper from sustainable forests

Contents

Acknowledgments	v
An Introduction to Spiritually Charged Communication	1
Part One: Connecting Like Jesus	5
<hr/>	
1 Spiritually Charged Communication: Relational Practices for Connecting Like Jesus	6
2 Soul Healing: Connecting Like Jesus Through Care of the Soul	20
Part Two: Practices for Soul Healing	33
<hr/>	
MARY ALBERT DARLING	
3 <i>It Is About You: Knowing Yourself as the Starting Point for Soul Healing</i>	34
4 <i>From Fear to Freedom: Overcoming What Keeps Us from Others</i>	52
5 <i>Sacred Listening: Hearing with the Ears of God</i>	64
6 <i>Connecting Through Questions: Why Asking Is Better Than Telling</i>	87
7 <i>Conflict: An Opportunity to Connect</i>	98
8 <i>Redeeming Conflict: Prayers and Other Practices for Oneness</i>	116
9 <i>When Stories Tell the Story: The Power to Shape a Narrative</i>	128
MARY ALBERT DARLING AND TONY CAMPOLO	

Part Three: Practices for Teaching and Preaching 149

TONY CAMPOLO

10	Preparing the Soil: Laying the Groundwork for Spiritually Dynamic Speaking	150
11	Planning Your Message: Crafting the Shape of Your Talk	171
12	Presenting Your Message: Why It All Leads Up to the Finale	192
	Postscript for Spiritually Charged Communication	209
	“One Another” Verses	211
	Using This Book in Small Groups or Classes	213
	Notes	217
	The Authors	225
	Index	227

Acknowledgments

We are deeply grateful to the following people who helped move this book from many drafts to its final form. Our sincere appreciation goes to:

Mary's sister, Judy Albert Hunt; sister-in-law, Barbara Darling; and lifelong friend, Pat Urban Ballard, for selflessly giving their time and energy to this project. They willingly read chapters, often on a moment's notice, and provided greatly valued feedback.

Student reader, Abby Wood, for her helpful editing of early drafts, and especially for her sensitivity to potential readers.

Jenny Timm, Mary's research assistant, for continuing to fine-tune the manuscript, way beyond the agreed-on time frame, and also for her encouraging spirit.

Robbie Bolton, education librarian at Spring Arbor University, for his expert researching skills, as well as his willingness to work up to the "final hour" (twice!) on making sure references were accurate.

James Warren, Tony's executive assistant, for keeping Tony's life in order so that he could have time to write.

Robert Gauthier, managing director of Tony's missionary organization, EAPE, for helping in Tony's research.

Sarah Blaisdell, for her typing and initial editing of Tony's chapters.

Betty Videto, for transcribing Shane Claiborne's and Brian McLaren's interviews, and for typing portions of Tony's material.

All those at Jossey-Bass who made this a publishable book: our superb editor, Sheryl Fullerton, and her gifted, much appreciated

staff: senior editorial assistant, Alison Knowles; copyeditor Michele Jones; and production manager, Joanne Clapp Fullagar.

Mary's dear "Friday lunch" friends: Bev, Carla, Deb, and Jan, for faithfully demonstrating what it means to care for others. And her colleagues at Spring Arbor University, especially Robert, Paul, Carol Ann, and Dr. Betty, for their ongoing support and encouragement of her writing.

We also want to thank a mutual friend, Damon Seacott, for demonstrating on a daily basis what it means to connect like Jesus in how he loves and serves others.

Special thanks to Shane Claiborne, Brian McLaren, and Mindy Caliguire, for their initial interviews for the book and for being willing to respond quickly to follow-up e-mails throughout the project.

We would have liked to thank *all* the people in both of our lives who have demonstrated that it really is possible to connect like Jesus through healing, teaching, and preaching. We are grateful to God that there are too many of you to name.

Finally, our deepest gratitude goes to our families:

To Mary's husband, Terry, for his constant encouragement and support, including his willingness to read chapters on demand; and to her two teenage boys, David and Michael, for their willingness to eat pizza several nights in a row.

To Tony's wife, Peggy, for graciously lending him out to others, and for lovingly supporting his many projects.

*Let the words of my mouth
and the meditation of my heart
be acceptable to you,
O Lord, my rock and my redeemer.*
—Psalm 19:14

*As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves
with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience.
Bear with one another and,
if anyone has a complaint against another,
forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you,
so you also must forgive.
Above all, clothe yourselves with love,
which binds everything together in perfect harmony...
And whatever you do, in word or deed,
do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus,
giving thanks to God the Father through him.*
—Colossians 3:12–14, 17

*To Judy, Barbara, and Pat
with gratitude*

An Introduction to Spiritually Charged Communication

It has been said that we live in a world in which we have created machines that act like people and people who act like machines. Most likely you have experienced both of these sources of alienation. You know how dehumanizing it is to make a phone call and realize that you are interacting with a machine, especially if the machine doesn't allow you to access the option you need. When you hear the recorded voice at the other end of the line say, "Please hold. Your call is very important to us," you may even feel like screaming, "I WANT TO CONNECT WITH A REAL PERSON!"

Worse yet, haven't you experienced times in conversations when those to whom you are speaking are absent even though they are physically present? They are somewhere else, or, even more disturbing, they are deadened souls. Trying to communicate with such people can even diminish your own soul.

This book is about relating to others in ways that satisfy the deepest needs in our souls. What we propose is more than learning what even the best communication scholars can teach us. Connecting like Jesus is a form of interacting that combines a variety of communication and spiritual practices, to engage in what we call *spiritually charged communication*. We believe that combining both kinds of practices is necessary for two reasons: those of us who claim to follow Jesus don't always connect with others in God-honoring ways, and those who have

good communication skills often lack a spiritual empowerment that would result in their being able to relate to others at deeper levels. The chemistry created when we combine both practices brings about a powerful reaction that has a transforming effect on our relationships.

In the pages that follow, we will explore ways of connecting dynamically with individuals, as well as with groups large and small. In all that we have to say, we will hold up Jesus, the one with ultimate connecting power, as our model. We believe that what we can learn from Jesus will make a world of difference in how we relate to others, whether over a meal, in a more formalized helping relationship, in small groups or classrooms, or in a public-speaking context.

We hope to demonstrate how every follower of Jesus can connect in ways that change our relationships, our lives, and the world. In Part One, we lay the groundwork for what we mean by the phrase “connecting like Jesus.” Part Two focuses primarily on soul healing in terms of our individual relationships with one another. In Part Three, Tony shares what he has learned and experienced as both a teacher and preacher, although you’ll find that several of his suggestions also apply to our everyday relationships.

As you read, we hope you will seriously consider engaging in the spiritual and communication practices we propose. The format of the book is also conducive for small group or classroom discussions. If you decide to use the material in either of these contexts, we hope our specific suggestions at the back of the book are helpful.

Although Jesus will be our primary example for connecting with others, along the way we include segments of personal interviews from Christian speakers and writers Shane Claiborne, Brian McLaren, and Mindy Caliguire to show how certain preachers, teachers, and soul healers in our present time have endeavored to carry out these ministries one-on-one and in larger groups. We would have also liked to interview John Wesley—theologian, evangelist, social activist, and founder of the Methodist Church—as we both greatly admire his work as preacher, teacher, and healer of souls. But since he died in 1791, we could not. So instead we have taken excerpts from some of his sermons and included them in a few chapters. You will also notice some quotes from the seventeenth-century French bishop François Fénelon, whose deep spiritual insights have influenced countless followers of Jesus to move beyond themselves into deeper connections with God and others.

We invite you to come along as we explore what it means to connect to others in life-transforming ways. If you accept this invitation, we can learn together how Jesus created, and continues to create, followers who can turn the world upside down with how they love one another.

PART ONE

Connecting
Like
Jesus

1

Spiritually Charged Communication

Relational Practices for Connecting Like Jesus

Two are better than one . . . For if they fall, one will lift up the other; but woe to one who is alone and falls and does not have another to help.

—Ecclesiastes 4:9–10

This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.

—Jesus, John 15:12

MOST OF US, from our earliest years, are taught that God existed before anything else was created. Did that mean that before creation God was a big lonely Being, all alone and surrounded by darkness? No—not if you believe in the Trinity: God, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit. If the Triune God is true, God never existed in isolation; instead, God has *always* been in relationship. Genesis 1:26 in fact says, “Let *us* make man in *our* image, in *our* likeness” (emphasis ours). This divine *relationship* existed before anything else was created. And because relationship implies communication,

the Triune God has always been a communicating God. As people created in the image of God, we too were made to communicate. Being alone and isolated from others goes against God’s intention for all humankind.



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Alcatraz, the infamous island prison in the San Francisco Bay, was known not only for its isolated location but also for an area of cells designated for solitary confinement called “the Hole.” When Mary and her family toured Alcatraz during a road trip out west, their youngest son Michael, then ten, stood in one of these cells. Mary explained how the Hole was designed to inflict what is considered one of the most extreme forms of punishment: minimal to no human contact. Michael’s unexpected response, “I don’t think it would be that bad,” was, Mary assumed, not an argument against the awful conditions of solitary confinement, but instead a testimony to having just spent forty-five hours in a van with his parents and older brother.

Although there are times when most, if not all, of us need to be alone, extended lack of communication with others is what has driven people in solitary confinement to insanity and even suicide. God never intended for us to exist without others. That does not mean, however, that we were made to be in just *any* type of relationship with *any* kind of communication. We were created to follow the perfect example of unity found in the Trinity. As author and speaker Brian McLaren said in our interview for this book, “The ultimate reality is communication or communion between Father, Son, and Spirit. They exist in an eternal connection, eternal community, eternal communion.”¹ From the beginning, God wanted creation to live that way too: in harmonious, peaceful relationships. That is what the Kingdom of God is all about.² Yet throughout all of history, human relationships have been much more messy and chaotic than they have been harmonious and peaceful.

Even God’s chosen people, the citizens of Israel, couldn’t get it right. They fell away from the good life God had planned for them and found themselves in captivity, longing to see God’s peaceful plan actualized in history. They knew what it could be like because their prophets had given them very concrete images of this Kingdom. The prophet Isaiah foretold that it would be a society in which children would not die in infancy, and elderly people would be able to live out their lives in health and well-being. It would be, according to Isaiah’s prophecies, a socio-economic order in which everyone would have a good job and workers would receive fair payment for their labor. When God’s Kingdom would be established here on earth, Isaiah declared, every family would build and inhabit a house of its own, and the suffering of the earth would end (Isaiah 65:17–25).

That is the Kingdom of God. A place where people are healthy, happy, and safe and everyone lives in soul-satisfying relationships. That’s the life God intended for us all. God calls the church to be a model for the

rest of the world of what the harmonious Kingdom will be like when Christ returns—with the hopes that others will want to be a part of that peaceable Kingdom too. As Jesus prayed in John 17:22–23, “The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.”

Jesus’ mission was aimed at gathering followers who would be willing to join him in a radical movement that would make the Hebrew prophets’ images of a peaceful Kingdom a reality for anyone who believed. In our interview, Brian McLaren said that joining Jesus means “God is setting the agenda, and we are to join in with God’s agenda. It means we are to fit in with harmony rather than disharmony. The purpose of our communication with God and others is to harmonize and bring ourselves in agreement with God’s Kingdom reality.” Brian is echoing what the Apostle Paul wrote to the church at Rome—that they were to love one another and live in peace (Romans 12:10, 16, 18). That was their purpose in life, and it is to be ours too, as the body of Christ. Our churches are to be models of the Kingdom of God. People who observe us are supposed to say, “See how they love one another! See how they live in harmony with one another—I want to be a part of this body of believers!”

Why isn’t the church perceived this way in the world today?

The answer lies in the painfully obvious fact that a peaceable Kingdom is not yet a reality for those of us who claim to be the body of Christ. As much as we might crave and even strive for the harmonious relationships God intended for us, we still find ourselves in shallow, nit-picky, and even destructive relationships. As speaker and social activist Shane Claiborne said in our interview, “People can be in love with a vision and really wreck each other trying to build that vision.”³ Far too often, others are disillusioned with how Christians relate to one another and to the world. As David Kinnaman discusses in his popular book, *Unchristian*, “Outsiders . . . think Christians no longer represent what Jesus had in mind, that Christianity in our society is not what it was meant to be.”⁴ Kinnaman found that strikingly high numbers of non-Christians categorize believers of Christianity as judgmental, hypocritical, and antihomosexual. From churchgoers who gossip about each other (with their concern sometimes masquerading as prayer requests) to religious leaders who intentionally misrepresent their religious opponents’ views on national TV to those who protest with hate speech, Christians often

relate to others in ways very much at odds with the transforming love of God.⁵

In the newsletter from an organization called the Transforming Center, founder and president Ruth Haley Barton mentioned an experience with a



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church elder who related to a staff member in a way that was “mean and even slanderous.” She goes on to write that “When confronted with such blatantly bad behavior, the best the elder could do was to acknowledge that her communication was ‘less than artful.’”⁶

Less than artful?

It’s not likely negative perceptions of Christians will change if we can’t see how wrong our own harmful communication patterns are. Loving others amid difficult circumstances can be extremely hard, but it’s still what God commands us to do. The Bible has much to say on this topic. In his letters to the early church, the Apostle Paul wrote that everything they did was to be done out of love for one another. To limit any confusion or excuses, he got very specific with several lists of “dos and don’ts.” He told them that as followers of Christ, they were not to be jealous of anyone for any reason, and they weren’t to brag about themselves either. They were not to get angry too easily or even to keep track of anything anyone did to them that they thought was wrong or unfair. They were not to complain or argue about *anything!* Instead, he told them to be kind and patient with one another; to forgive one another as God in Christ forgives them. In short, they were to be devoted to one another and humbly consider others better than themselves (1 Corinthians 16:14, 13:4–5; Ephesians 4:32; Philippians 2:3, 14). And these were not the only directives to the early church for how they were to demonstrate love for one another. There are dozens of “one another” verses in the Bible that tell followers of Christ how to relate to each other. We may wish there were exceptions written into these verses—“forgive one other *unless*” or “do not complain *unless*”—but there aren’t any.

The “one another” verses in scripture can make for great sermons, Bible studies, and readings at weddings, but once the sermon, study, or wedding is over, they seem next to impossible to live out on a daily basis. Instead, we often live with disconnects between saying that we want to imitate Christ and actually following Christlike ways of communicating

with one another. We sing the popular Hillsong worship chorus, “Tell the world,” but what are we really telling the world with our actions



We claim to be transformed by Jesus, but cannot seem to transform the ways we relate to those closest to us, much less to the world.



radically loving ways like Jesus. Christ followers can and do get it right. But the number of people who call themselves Christian is much larger than the number of those who intentionally and regularly practice Christlike communication in their everyday lives.

Our hope in writing this book is to change those numbers. We affirm that the meaningful, fulfilling, unifying relationships God intended before the beginning of time are truly possible. We believe that the “one another” verses in the Bible really can be lived out in how we daily communicate. The key is in learning to relate to others as Jesus did when he walked the earth. When Jesus communicated, he did so in ways that consistently *connected* him to his audience.

toward one another? We claim to be transformed by Jesus, but cannot seem to transform the ways we relate to those closest to us, much less to the world. As Mohandas Gandhi once said, “I like your Christ. I do not like your Christians. Your Christians are so unlike your Christ.”⁷

It’s not that there aren’t any Christians who communicate in

What Does It Mean to Connect?

As we pointed out in the Introduction, it can be one thing to communicate but quite another to connect. We can use a variety of solid communication techniques and still feel a lack of connectedness with others. Not connecting to others can be a very lonely and estranged feeling. It’s possible to feel this disconnect and alienation no matter the setting or how well we know someone.

Connecting is a different level of communication than talking in an interesting manner or using solid communication techniques in our interactions. Connecting suggests a depth of mutual understanding and sharing. Saying we connect with someone means we sense a special bond, or even feel a sense of unity, with that person. We may even experience what Hasidic philosopher Martin Buber called an “I-Thou” relationship, whereby a person encounters another not as an object (I-it) but as a sacred being made in the image of God. Seeing others this way bridges our separateness. The unity that results is at the center of what it means

to connect in Christlike ways. There is an intense hunger in our world for this kind of connectedness that can make the “one another” verses a reality.

Connecting Like Jesus

Throughout time and history, no one has connected to others like Jesus did. Jesus related in “I-Thou” ways not only to his peers but to those whom his culture considered beneath *and* beyond his own social class. A hodgepodge of people followed him, from outcasts to government officials to fishermen, everyone wanting, for as many reasons as there were followers, to connect with him. Roman soldiers who had been sent to arrest him returned empty-handed because they had stopped to listen to him. Jesus so powerfully connected with them, touching the very depths of their souls, that they forgot why they had been sent. They could only explain to their supervisors, “Never has anyone spoken like this!” (John 7:46). Men who had spent a lifetime as fishermen, upon hearing Jesus say, “Follow me!” dropped their nets and became his disciples. The charisma that was evident in what he said magnetized crowds so that they not only listened to him for hours but then would follow him wherever he went, hoping to hear more (Mark 6:30–33). When Jesus



*When Jesus spoke, he
changed lives.*



spoke, he changed lives. The impact was so noticeable that even his enemies could tell when his followers had been with him (Acts 4:13).

What was it about the way Jesus connected with others that made him attract so many people? Even the best communication strategies are not enough to produce the powerful connections that Jesus had with others—connections that held the attention of both the simplest child and the most elite religious scholar; connections that resulted in person after person dropping everything to follow Jesus; connections so powerfully transforming that because of Jesus, all of history was changed.

The answer to the question “What made Jesus connect in such powerful ways?” might appear to be the obvious: “Because he’s God!” Although it seems safe to assume that Jesus had an unfair advantage—after all, he was and is the Son of God—that is not the only reason he knew how to dynamically connect with people. He did not *automatically* know all things because he was the son of God. At four years old he did not walk around in WWJD fashion and ask “What should I do?” and then just *know*. As the Apostle Paul told the church at Philippi, even though Jesus was “in very nature God,” he came to earth as a baby and “made himself

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