

Connection: The Power That Binds Us



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A Word That Carries Weight

I have been thinking a great deal about a word, and the more I sit with it, the more I realize that it is not a small word, nor a casual one, nor something that can be spoken and set aside without consequence. It is a word that carries weight, something ancient and foundational, something that reaches beneath the surface of how we live and presses into why we live the way we do. It is spoken often, almost carelessly at times, and yet when one slows down long enough to truly consider it, it begins to deepen, to open, to reveal a quiet magnitude that reshapes how we see ourselves, how we encounter others, and how we understand healing itself.

It is, in many respects, a sacred word, a majestic word, not because it sounds impressive, but because of what it holds, because of what unfolds in its presence and what withers in its absence. It is a word that has followed me across decades of clinical work, long before I had the language of neuroscience to describe what I was witnessing, long before I understood the physiological systems that would later confirm it. Even then, I could see it. I could feel it. I knew it when it was present, and I knew it when it was missing. And the more I return to it, the more I am convinced that it is not merely important; it is essential.

The word is connection.

What Connection Actually Means

At its root, the word itself tells us something profound. It comes from the Latin connectere, formed from **con**, meaning “with” or “together,” and **nectere**, meaning “to bind, to tie, to fasten.”

Connection is not simply contact. It is not proximity. It is not the exchange of words or the presence of another person in the room. It is, quite literally, to be bound together, to be fastened into union.

The Greek deepens this further. **Koinōnia** speaks of shared life, of participation beyond surface interaction, a kind of mutuality that cannot be reduced to standing next to another person. **Desmos** speaks of a bond, a ligament, that which holds things together and prevents fragmentation. When taken seriously, these meanings begin to press on something deeper than preference or personality. Connection is not something we add to life when it is convenient. It is the very thing that holds life together.

The Neuroscience of Connection

From the standpoint of neuroscience, connection is not optional. It is regulatory. It is stabilizing. It is life-giving in the most literal sense, and when we understand the nervous system more deeply, we begin to see why.

Within the framework articulated by Stephen Porges, the autonomic nervous system is constantly evaluating safety through what he termed neuroception. Beneath conscious awareness, the system is asking a simple but profound question: am I safe, or am I alone? And the answer to that question determines whether we open or close, whether we engage or withdraw, whether we move toward life or into defense.

When the system is in sympathetic activation, we are mobilized for threat. When the system drops into dorsal vagal shutdown, we withdraw, collapse, and disconnect. In both of these states, connection is not readily accessible. We may be physically present, but we are not relationally available. We cannot fully see another, hear another, or attune to another.

Connection lives in the ventral vagal system. It is here that the social engagement system comes online, where eye contact, vocal tone, facial expression, and presence signal safety to another human being. When the ventral vagal pathway is active, we are not only calm, we are open, accessible, and capable of relationship.

And critically, we do not arrive there alone. We co-regulate. A regulated nervous system can help bring another nervous system out of defense and into safety. Through presence, tone, and attunement, one person’s state can begin to organize another’s. This is not metaphor. It is biology. And in many cases, it is lifesaving.

This process is not limited to the brain. The heart plays a central role. Through neurocardiology and HeartMath®, the heart communicates continuously with the brain and body. In coherence, reflected

in heart rate variability, the system shifts toward integration. These states extend beyond the individual and influence others.

Connection is biological, systemic, and powerful.

When Connection Is Absent

When connection is absent, the system does not remain neutral. It shifts, and it shifts in ways that carry real physiological consequence.

In states of chronic disconnection, the nervous system moves into patterns of sustained sympathetic activation or dorsal vagal shutdown. Cortisol rises. The body prepares for threat, not momentarily, but often continuously. Over time, this begins to wear on the system. The heart moves out of coherent rhythm into patterns of dysregulation. The cardiovascular system bears increased strain. Inflammation rises. The immune system becomes less effective.

In other cases, the system collapses into withdrawal. Energy diminishes. Engagement fades. What appears as numbness on the surface reflects a deeper loss of access to relational safety.

In both directions, the body reorganizes around survival rather than connection.

And the effects extend further than we often recognize. Chronic stress and disconnection can influence gene expression through epigenetic mechanisms, altering how genes are read and expressed in ways that can predispose individuals to a range of downstream health challenges.

This is not abstract. It is measurable. And over time, it shapes the trajectory of a life, often in the direction of diminished vitality, reduced health, and, in many cases, a shortened life.

And the consequences are not only physical. They are emotional, psychological, relational, and spiritual, because disconnection does not simply affect how we feel, it affects how we live, how we relate, and how we experience meaning itself.

When the System Seeks Something Else

When connection is absent, the system does not simply go without. It seeks.

Because the nervous system was never designed to exist in isolation. It was designed to organize around connection, around safety found in relationship, around the presence of another who is regulated, attuned, and available. And when that kind of connection is not present, the system does not stop needing it. It looks elsewhere.

At its core, the issue is not simply behavior or even substance. The deeper issue is the absence of consistent access to safe, healthy connection, both in relationship and in a lived, embodied faith.

And when those are not present, the system adapts. It binds itself to what is available.

Addiction, then, is not simply the pursuit of pleasure. It is the attempt to regulate a dysregulated system in the absence of connection. It is the brain and body reaching for something that can soothe, organize, or create even a temporary sense of coherence.

And in a very real sense, it works. It provides relief. It mimics regulation. It creates a form of connection.

But it is not real. It is a counterfeit. And this type of connection, which falsely masquerades as genuine, does not give life. It takes. And over time, it can take everything, even the life of the one who depends on it.

Where Connection Becomes Real

This is why I have come to love working with those still in addiction, those who have been stripped down, who have lost enough that illusion no longer holds.

Because in that space, connection becomes everything.

Not as an idea, but as something lived, something felt, something necessary for survival. You see it in the way they embrace one another, not with a quick, surface-level gesture, but with a real embrace, a long embrace, a grounded, present, unguarded connection between two human beings who understand that they need one another.

You hear the words I love you, and they are not empty. They are not casual. They are not said to fill space. They are spoken from a place that understands what it means to suffer, what it means to be alone, what it means to come close to losing everything.

And in that place, those words become lifelines. Real ones.

And there is a question that begins to emerge, sometimes spoken, sometimes simply felt. Are you willing to give this up for something real? Are you willing to let go of what numbs, what isolates, what mimics connection, for the sake of something deeper, something that does not anesthetize pain but transforms it?

Because what begins to emerge is something better. Not easier, but better. A connection that regulates not artificially, but relationally. A connection that restores rather than depletes. A connection that binds in a way that strengthens rather than enslaves.

And what is striking is that even in the middle of their struggle, even while they are still fighting for their lives, they do not only receive this. They give it. They reach outward. They show up. They bind

themselves to one another in ways that are not calculated, not transactional, but deeply, unmistakably real.

The Gap Between Words and Living

And yet, we speak of connection often, but we do not always live it. Not in the consistent, quiet ways that actually build something real. Not in the small, seemingly insignificant moments that, over time, either strengthen or erode the fabric of relationship.

It shows up in unanswered phone calls, in messages left without reply, in the moments where we think to reach out and do not. It shows up in the quiet prioritization of our own schedules, our own concerns, our own comfort over the opportunity to step toward another human being.

It is subtle, but it accumulates, and over time, it erodes something sacred.

We even have a word for it now, ghosting, a quiet withdrawal, a disappearance without acknowledgment, a breaking of connection without the dignity of presence. And if we are honest, we have felt it, and we have done it.

And so the question turns inward. Not as accusation, but as invitation. Because this is not corrected at the level of culture first. It is corrected one life at a time, one decision at a time, one moment of choosing presence over absence.

Connection at a Cost

Long ago, Aristotle described relationships of utility, pleasure, and virtue. The first two are easy to recognize. The third is different. Virtuous connection is grounded in the good of the other. It is not driven by what we receive, but by what we are willing to give.

It is not always comfortable. It is not always convenient. It requires presence, risk, and a willingness to step toward another without guarantee.

I have known this kind of connection. I have experienced it in my relationship with God, in my walk with Christ, and in the presence of people who chose to step into difficult spaces when I had very little to offer in return. And I have also known its absence, when words were spoken but not lived, when presence was promised but not given.

And I cannot place myself outside of that tension. I have been on both sides of it. There are moments where I have chosen convenience over presence, where I have allowed busyness to become an excuse. And yet, through my patients, through my brothers in addiction, through the science, and through Christ Himself, I continue to be brought back to the same truth.

We have to show up.

Not only in the obvious moments, but in the small ones, because it is in those small moments that something real is either formed or quietly lost.

The Full Expression

And ultimately, we see the fullest expression of this not in theory, but in Christ, not distant, not conditional, not convenient, but embodied, present, and sacrificial. A connection that enters in, that stays, that gives without guarantee, that loves at cost.

And if that is the model, then the invitation is not merely to admire it or speak about it, but to live it, to move toward others in ways that reflect that same willingness to be present, to give, to remain, even when it costs something.

Because in the end, connection is not revealed in what we say, but in how we live, in whether we are willing to bind ourselves to one another in ways that are real, sustained, and life-giving.

And when we do, even imperfectly, something begins to be restored, not only in others, but in ourselves, because we were never designed to live unbound, we were designed to be joined, and it is in that joining that life begins to take shape again in the way it was always meant to.