

Swimming alone or part of the shoal?

Natural scientists have tried to understand the phenomenon of swarms for many years but their studies have only recently given new insights. Whether it be wildebeest and zebra avoiding the carnivorous crocodiles, starlings confusing the feisty falcons or fish dazzling their swordfish predators, apparently it's still true, there is safety in numbers!



Disconnected?

Give it 7 days

Please do contact us for further information
and to order C4L materials.

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Yet many thousands of us who consider ourselves Christians and once regularly attended church no longer do so. And there are some who have a measure of disconnection from God but still go to church ... just about! We may now go occasionally, but we are happy to swim alone – besides, we have good reasons for no longer wanting to hang out with the shoal!

This booklet, *'Disconnected? Give it 7 Days!'* has been given to you by a friend who cares. You may think they've forgotten you, but they haven't. Maybe your friends don't understand why you stopped coming to church but giving you this booklet is their way of saying 'I miss you!' and asking you to give it 7 days to think about it again.

It may be painful to look back in this way, but there's pain on both sides when a rift comes into relationships. Perhaps, just perhaps, this booklet will help you to understand why you left and whether there are still reasons to keep you away.

So will you set aside a few quiet minutes each day for the next 7 days to look through this booklet? You may find you want to consider rejoining the shoal. **The fact is ... things change. And we change too!**

Who knows, this could lead you into a completely new season of life with God. And you don't need to feel defensive about this, no one is judging or criticising you.

HERE'S SOMETHING TO REFLECT ON:
(Circle your answer)
I CAN STILL REMEMBER VIVIDLY WHY I STOPPED GOING TO CHURCH

YES NO UNSURE

I AM NOT SURE IF I HAVE STOPPED GOING ... YET!

YES NO UNSURE

There are 7 main reasons for a person walking away – or **DISCONNECTING** – from church, either temporarily or forever. **THESE ARE:**

1. The Church
2. The Leaders
3. God
4. Life circumstances
5. The World
6. The Devil
7. Yourself!

As you read this you may be at any one of a number of stages of disconnection – either from **church**, from **God**, or you may be **'between churches'**. The chart below will help you to identify where you are:

POSSIBLE REASONS FOR DISCONNECTION

Circle those that most reflect how you feel
1 = Least agree; 10 = Most agree

THE CHURCH

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

THE LEADER(S)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

GOD

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

LIFE CIRCUMSTANCES

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

THE WORLD

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

THE DEVIL

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

MYSELF

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

ARE YOUR ANSWERS WHAT YOU WOULD HAVE EXPECTED?

YES NO UNSURE

HAS THERE BEEN A CHANGE FROM WHEN YOU FIRST DISCONNECTED?

YES NO UNSURE

What this programme IS NOT ...

- A guilt trip ...
When did God ever say He was going to bring us into guilt?
- A finger pointing exercise ...
There are always more fingers pointing back at the finger pointer!

What the programme IS ...

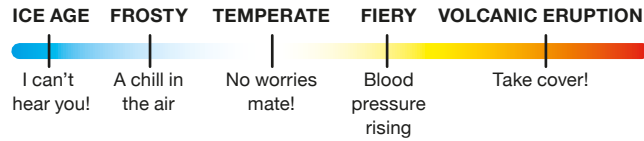
- A chance to think back to ...
- The most special and important decision of your life
 - Your Father God, who thinks about you every day

It's actually quite exciting when you think about it.

FOR NOW, THINK ABOUT YOUR FATHER WHO LOVES YOU ...

WHAT DO YOU THINK YOUR THERMOMETER READING IS WHEN 'CHURCH' IS MENTIONED?

Circle your temperature on this gauge:



Given time and a change in the climate, even an ice age can end!

Church – ‘you hurt me!’

If you circled anything other than ‘temperate’, you probably have some unresolved issues and hurts ...

Today we’re talking about hurts inflicted by the collective church which have contributed to you disconnecting either from God or from church – we’ll look at hurts from leadership tomorrow! The fact is that pain and hurts come in all shapes and sizes and can be found in every church and denomination.

Many Christians experience hurt through church at some point. Looking at points A to D opposite, circle the option for each point that is closest to your experience.

- A** = Someone deliberately put some gossip around about you or cold shouldered you
- B** = Someone forgot to invite you to a social or to send a card to you when you were unwell
- C** = You don’t talk to someone at church and then feel hurt when they don’t speak to you
- D** = You imagine that some church members ignore you, maybe because of over-sensitivity or tiredness

We need to deal with hurts to our souls otherwise they become powerful negative emotions that can be destructive. It’s interesting that God has made our bodies with in-built healing properties – scarring is a sign of a healed wound. The word ‘scar’ comes from the Greek ‘eschara’, which also means ‘place of fire’.

Does your soul feel like it’s been there?

5 STEPS TO ACCELERATE THE HEALING OF PHYSICAL WOUNDS		A PARALLEL FOR SPIRITUAL HURTS?
1. RECOGNISE INJURY	If you are wounded, don’t pretend that you are not	Be honest with yourself and others
2. REMOVE FROM DANGER	If in danger, identify the source and get clear of it	Remove from any situation of spiritual abuse
3. INVESTIGATE THE WOUND	The wound must be located before diagnosis	Understand the nature of the wound, eg harmful words
4. REMOVE DEBRIS	Fragments must come out, but only at the right time	Extract untruths and replace with truth
5. GIVE TREATMENT AND REHAB	Surgery may be needed – the healing process takes time	Make space first for God and me, then talk with trusted Christian friends

Broken bones are stronger where they knit together again as a result of the healing process. This can be you too!

What GOD has to say about this:

*‘Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another.
Forgive as the Lord forgave you’*

Has not happened to me		Unsure	Has happened to me	
1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5

ADD YOUR SCORE:

4–10: the hurt, if any, is mild and is probably not the main cause of any disconnection.
11–15: you are carrying church-related pain, although you may not be able to define it.
16–20: the hurt you carry from church experience is intense and often troubles you.



ME: What will I say to Him on this one?
(Circle your answer if you wish)

- A) No way, do you realise how much they hurt me?**
- B) OK, I’ll do it, but help me and heal my hurt**

Leaders – ‘you ignored me!’

LET'S HAVE A LOOK AT WHAT YOUR ISSUES WITH A CHURCH LEADER OR LEADERS MAY BE:

MY ISSUE WITH LEADER(S) IS: ...

Insert your score 1 = least agree; 10 = most agree

	SCORE
They expect too much from church members	
They don't make church interesting and relevant	
They overlook people like me	
They are only after our money	
They are judgmental	
What they say and what they do don't match up	
They abuse their position	
NOW ADD YOUR TOTAL	

Here's what your scores might indicate:

1 – 15: You had good relationships with your church leader(s) and respect them. They were not the problem!

16 – 55: This could be one of the main reasons you have disconnected from the church. The leader(s) have not matched up to your expectations in words or actions. You were probably willing to cut them some slack initially, but it eventually drove you away.

56 – 70: You really have been offended!

We expect much of our leaders, but they too are human and don't always live up to our expectations – but then, if we're honest, we're not always perfect either. True?



CIRCLE YOUR ANSWERS TO THE FOLLOWING:

MY EXPECTATIONS OF LEADERS ARE NOT TOO HIGH

YES NO UNSURE

I SET THE SAME STANDARDS FOR MYSELF

YES NO UNSURE

MY FAITH DOES NOT DEPEND ON LEADERS, BUT ON CHRIST

YES NO UNSURE

If you do have an issue that needs to be addressed with a leader or leaders, and some must be addressed, then do it! Do you remember how Jesus said personal difficulties like this should be handled?

- First, see the leader one to one; *if that does not resolve things,*
- Take someone along with you; *failing that,*
- Bring the issue to the whole church.

Did you do any of these things?

Our temptation is to walk before we talk – but we should talk before we walk! You can't help yourself or protect others by going to ground. If church leaders need to be accountable, then hold them accountable. But do it in the right way.

What GOD has to say about this:

'But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken.'

ME: Circle True, False or Unsure:

A) I am able to submit to the authority of godly leaders

TRUE FALSE UNSURE

B) I am satisfied that I do all I can to support leaders

TRUE FALSE UNSURE

God

– ‘where were you?’

WHERE DO YOU STAND WITH GOD AT THE MOMENT?

Circle a) or b)

A) on speaking terms? B) seeking peace with Him?

Tick which of the following best fits your view of God:

- ☐ Who? Darwin has done away with God
- ☐ Distant, hard to please and doesn't seem to care
- ☐ He is my Father
- ☐ Other:

Assuming that, at one time at least, you would say you had a relationship with God, think about the things that have put a strain on your faith in Him – circle and give comment to God:

YOUR CIRCUMSTANCES	TRUE	FALSE	MY MESSAGE TO GOD ABOUT THIS:
Bereavement			
Unanswered Prayer			
Disappointment			
Suffering			
Divorce			

Were any of these circumstances so bad that your fuse blew and you lost connection with Him?

YES

NO

UNSURE

Some people become so angry with God that they tell Him He no longer exists. You know Job's story ... no one had it harder than he did. He was a guy who had it all but lost everything except his life and a nagging wife! Like Abraham and Jacob, he tells God exactly how he's feeling – and it seems God can cope with this, even when we're that angry:

'I cry out to you, O God, but you do not answer;

I stand up, but you merely look at me.

You turn on me ruthlessly; with the might of your hand you attack me.'

Amazingly, God is willing to engage with us so long as we will engage with Him – He really does want a connection with us that much.

Job felt badly let down by God – not only were things taken away from him, but he didn't feel he was fairly treated. So He called God to the witness box – and God came, and still comes to those who seek Him today.

What GOD has to say about this:

'Do you presume to tell me what I'm doing wrong: Are you calling me a sinner so you can be a saint?

I'll gladly step aside and hand things over to you – you can surely save yourself with no help from me!'

ME:

A) I blame You, God, for the way my life has turned out

TRUE

FALSE

UNSURE

B) I do want to have a connection with You if You'll give me another chance

TRUE

FALSE

UNSURE



It's Just Life ...!



*'My days are swifter than a runner;
they fly away without a glimpse of joy.
They skim past like boats of papyrus,
like eagles swooping down on their prey.'*

That was Job's take on things – life was rushing along and he was struggling to keep up with it.

Here are some more reasons people disconnect. Tick those that might apply to you first, and then those that might apply to others you know. The front door of the church is always open – in theory! But so is the back door – as you know!

LIFE CIRCUMSTANCE	ME	OTHERS
Moved to a new area		
Changed job		
Baby came along		
Age or sickness		
Pace of life, needed time out on a Sunday		

These reasons for disconnecting from the church seem to be entirely valid – and you could add many others, eg church relocated, transport problems, need to visit family etc

Let's think ... When does a person join the church? Is it:

WHEN THEY ARE ADDED TO THE MEMBERSHIP LIST

TRUE FALSE UNSURE

WHEN THEY FIRST TRULY PUT THEIR FAITH IN CHRIST

TRUE FALSE UNSURE

WHEN THEY HAVE BEEN BAPTISED

TRUE FALSE UNSURE

What does church mean to you?

Which of the following is how God describes it?

BUILDING – the place I was christened, married or sometimes attend

PEOPLE – a community of ordinary people worshipping God

FAMILY – the people that God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit have added to Their family

BRIDE – the beautiful bride for whom Jesus Christ has said He will return at the end of this age

BODY – the body of Christ here on earth in which every believer in Christ has a rightful place

It is **NOT** the building but it is **ALL** the others! Becoming part of the Church of Jesus Christ is a huge thing – truly putting faith in Christ is to connect for life to Him and to His people. Church is not something we as children of God should treat as a social club for our convenience – we belong to them and they to us. Do you remember the story Jesus told of the banquet? All the excuses came back – someone had just got married, another had some ploughing to do and so on. This is a banquet to bless you and there's a place at the table for you.

If your main reason for disconnection is to do with changed circumstances, it's quite likely that you just haven't got round to getting back or making contact to ask for a visit. If you're too busy, then you're too busy!

'For there is a proper time and procedure for every matter, though a man's misery weighs heavily upon him.'

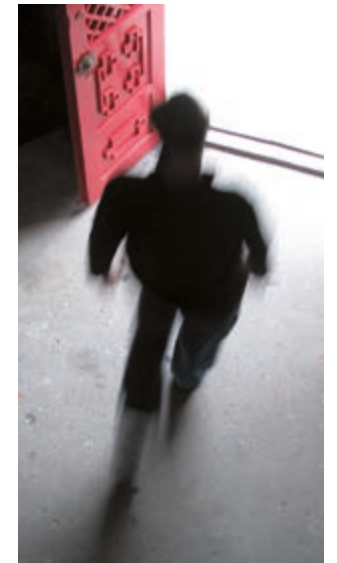
What GOD has to say about this:

'Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another – and all the more as you see the Day approaching.'

ME: Which will I go for, A or B?

A) I'll get around to going back some time

B) It's time to go back now





World

– ‘I’ve other priorities!’

emails

family

friends

work

sport

housework

gardening

DIY

There are so many cries for our

attention: emails, family, friends, work, sport, housework, gardening, car washing, bills to pay, shopping, DIY jobs ... 24 hours are too short for all that needs to be done, let alone for ‘doing’ church too!

But not so fast ... It all depends on your ‘worldview’!

We all have a worldview – it’s the set of pre-suppositions and biases that affect the way we view all of life and reality. It’s like a pair of glasses through which we see the world – it is shaped by our education, our upbringing, the culture we live in, the media and movies we absorb. Most of us do not have a strategic and rational worldview we could define, but it filters everything we see, determines everything we do and governs everything we say.

What shapes your worldview?

For each statement tick the relevant box:

YOUR WORLDVIEW	CHRISTIAN (BIBLICAL)	SECULAR (WORLD)	OTHER (say which)
1. An ‘ontology’ – how did the world come to be?			
2. An explanation of the world – why are we here?			
3. A ‘futurology’ – where are we heading?			
4. Ethics model – what is right and wrong?			
5. A methodology – how should we achieve our goals?			
6. A ‘theory of knowledge’ (epistemology) – what is true and false?			

What shapes your worldview affects your priorities and affects your life! The model you have is one you will seek to reinforce.

Job’s world view could have been adversely shaped by suffering and yet he had total conviction of the honour, power and justice of God’s ways. God’s priorities became his.

What GOD has to say about this:

‘Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is – his good and pleasing and perfect will.’

ME:

A) I would say my worldview is Christian

TRUE

FALSE

UNSURE

B) I would say I am ‘a connected Christian’

TRUE

FALSE

UNSURE

DAY 6

You know the old joke – Adam blamed Eve, Eve blamed the serpent and he didn't have a leg to stand on!

Remember, the main reason you are going through this booklet is because someone cares about you and misses you. Is your worldview taking you to or away from God, to His people or away from them?

Devil – ‘I listened!’

Sadly, Eve listened to the lies of the serpent – and it landed them and us in a whole heap of trouble! In God's eyes there is no such thing as a half-truth; but the serpent, as the 'father of lies', deals in seductive half-truths. All his schemes are carefully planned to separate us from God and His people – what a contrast to God's plans which are for our good. Who was it, after all, who crushed the serpent's head and his power? None other than God's own Son, Jesus Christ, who cried out at the cross for you, 'It is finished'!

REMEMBER THE DEVILS WORDS?

'DID GOD REALLY SAY, "you must not eat from any tree in the garden?"'

CIRCLE ANY SIMILAR SCHEMES THE DEVIL HAS USED AGAINST YOU:



**YOU HAD A BAD THOUGHT, THEREFORE
YOU ARE A BAD PERSON**

YES NO UNSURE

TRY THIS – IT'S REALLY NOT HARMFUL

YES NO UNSURE

**NOW YOU'RE OUT OF THE GARDEN TOO
WITH NO WAY BACK**

YES NO UNSURE

OH, IT DOESN'T MATTER JUST THIS ONCE

YES NO UNSURE

GOD DOESN'T REALLY CARE ABOUT YOU

YES NO UNSURE

When Adam first broke away from God, God called out, 'Where are you?' This is His call to all who are away from Him. Once truly connected through Christ, nothing can separate you from God – it is not His plan to lose you. He is the Father in the story of the Prodigal Son – allowing us free choice, and yet in pain until we come to our senses and return to the family, whereupon He has a celebration to welcome us back! The devil schemes to separate you from God's flock – tick which of these ploys he tries to use to cut you off:

- ☐ Church is boring
- ☐ Church does not cater for interest groups
- ☐ Church is for women
- ☐ Church is against gays
- ☐ Church is irrelevant and out of touch
- ☐ Church is for the elderly
- ☐ Church is a crutch
- ☐ Church is for Sunday, Easter and Christmas
- ☐ Church isn't concerned with the big global issues
- ☐ Church overloads me – always wanting me to do things
- ☐ Church doesn't meet my needs

What GOD has to say about this:

'Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armour of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.'

ME: Which voice am I listening to?

Circle below:

A) I know I am a child of God

YES NO UNSURE

B) I want to be part of His flock under His care

YES NO UNSURE





... and, as one song goes, 'I'll cry if I want to!' In the drama of your life, there's no doubt that you have the leading role. But how does your story fit into the bigger story, God's story, in which we all share? Who is centre stage – Him or you? Who do you think should be ... Him or you?

Try your hand at these questions:

THE WORD 'PHILOSOPHY' IS FROM ANCIENT GREEK AND MEANS LOVE OF WHAT?

W _ _ _ _ _

EPICURUS TAUGHT WE SHOULD MINIMIZE PAIN AND MAXIMIZE PLEASURE, ALSO CALLED?

H _ _ _ _ _

GOD WANTS US TO MAXIMIZE OUR PLEASURE FOREVER BY HAVING A RESTORED

R _ _ _ _ _

Hedonism is one of the most powerful modern religions but it has proved to be a hollow delusion, teaching that we can get our identity, value and purpose out of mere things in the material world – yet another lie!

Jesus said, 'truth sets you free'.

If 1 = Least agree and 10 = Most agree, see where you stand on these statements made by Jesus:

	YOUR RATING
'I did not come to judge the world but to save it'	
'I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again'	
'For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord'	
'Whoever lives and believes in me will never die'	
'I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full'	
ADD YOUR TOTAL:	

What your scores might indicate!

5 – 20: It sounds as though you're still not totally convinced.

21 – 40: You know you need a Saviour, but often find yourself doubting due to the pressures and challenges of life. You are quite open to getting back to church.

41 – 50: You have a broad view of what Church is and what it means to be a part of it.

God calls the 'me' things that often separate us from Him weakness of the flesh. These things become blockages to our relationship with God. Tick anything below that causes you a problem:

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| ☐ Temptation | ☐ Fear |
| ☐ Anger | ☐ Sin |
| ☐ Guilt | ☐ Condemnation |
| ☐ Shame | ☐ Doubt |

'ME' says – I'm not good enough to go to church!

'ME' says – I just can't live as God wants me to so why bother trying?

Let Jesus put a stop to the 'POM' (poor old me) party. Remember how He restored Peter after he had denied Him three times? Here are seven truths to demonstrate God's amazing grace and limitless love:

- Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak.
- Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.
- My Father, who gave them to me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand.
- If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.
- My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.
- What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us?
- In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness ... the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's Will.

God invites you to His party – and to forgive as you are forgiven

ME: Go ... or go for it ... which is it to be?



What next?

If you have followed this 7-day programme the hope is that you have sensed God stirring you. We started by thinking about whether to swim alone or as part of the shoal. We could now look at this another way:

'I am the Good Shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me'

Does that sound familiar? It's a voice calling you to a place of love, safety, good pasture and like-minded companions. God is the Good Shepherd and you are His much-loved lost sheep.

You may feel you are looking at a signpost and having to choose which direction to go in: my Way or His Way. Choose God's Way – and enjoy the unlimited and abundant grace of God! Don't wait until you are good enough or there is enough good in your life – God loves you now.

Here is some good advice from Proverbs:

'My son, pay attention to what I say; listen closely to my words. Do not let them out of your sight, keep them within your heart; for they are life to those who find them and health to a man's whole body. Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life' (Proverbs 4:20–23).



THERE ARE NOW TWO OPTIONS OPEN TO YOU:

1) If you are wondering about reconnecting to Christ and/or church you can enjoy two informal and relaxing evenings with others in the same position and with similar issues to discuss. Ask the friend who gave you this booklet for details of these two one-hour sessions, called ABC – A Better Connection.

Alternatively you may want to read the *21-Day Personal Study Guide for Reconnectors*.

2) If, having read Day 7 again, you are unsure if you have ever been connected to Christ, the booklet *Unconnected? Give it 7 Days!* will help you.

Both booklets can be obtained either through your friend or by visiting

www.conect4life.org.uk

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Design: Simon Ray
Photographs: sxc.hu

Printed in England by Image 2001

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