

BIND US *Together*

A Guide to
Developing
Lasting Bonds

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Dedication

To all connectors, especially to my sisters:

Marie Johnson
Regina Graham
Claudette Taylor

You have become world-class at drawing others in and making them feel significant.

To my dearest long-time friend, Becky King, who started my metamorphosis (remember what a mouse I was?).

To Connie Cooper, the friend who threw me a lifeline and held on for dear life.

To my dear, dear friend, Dr. Jimmie Jones, who was so certain I could do this.

Special thanks to Dr. David O'Keeffe and Dr. Charles Apple who first made me believe that just maybe I could write—if I had something to say.

Endorsements

Ever since we were little girls on the playground, we have felt the need to belong—to matter to someone outside our family circle. As Christian women, we still long for acceptance and understanding through connection with others. Through her insightful suggestions in *Bind Us Together*, Doritta leads us to fulfill this need for ourselves and for our Christian sisters.

—Laurel Sewell, former first lady, Freed-Hardeman University,
Henderson, Tennessee

Bind Us Together taught me that connections cannot be coerced, only chosen. Students are instructed to research what the Bible says about the need for connection with God and fellow Christians. God gave of Himself; we must do the same. I especially identified with the summary chapter, “Welcome Ties that Bind,” which emphasized seeing all people as souls. God designed us for connection, which requires sacrifice of time and efforts in the best interest of others. The benefits of these sacrifices happen to be in our own best interest. God knows best!

—Stephanie Vick, proofreader, Greenville, South Carolina

I studied these lessons with our ladies’ class and wholeheartedly recommend each one to guide Christians in achieving better relationships. We learned how to foster meaningful fellowship. The book is a how-to guide for anyone who has ever struggled to find a place in a group.

—Ann Dunnaway, chiropractor, Tuscumbia, Alabama

In an age of social media, deep meaningful relationships are rare. *Bind Us Together* meets a great need and teaches us how to make those connections, first with God and then with others. I love the discussion questions and actual ways to get involved!

—Rosemary McKnight, author of *Those Who Wait*, Henderson, Tennessee

As a ladies' Bible class teacher, I'm always searching for challenging material to promote growth. After reading *Bind Us Together*, I am eager to present these ideas of developing the awareness of others! Disconnection is a very real problem in many congregations. We often focus only on familiar, comfortable acquaintances. Shame on us! Not only does this book make us aware of this issue; it gives us very sound, definite steps leading toward unity. There is no such thing as an unneeded Christian. "Bind us together with cords that cannot be broken," we often sing. What a powerful book, full of tools for strong ties of love!

—Becky King, elder's wife and ladies' Bible Class teacher, Anderson, Indiana

I really appreciate how Doritta uses Jesus as our example and compares our human connections with our connection to God. *Bind Us Together* shows how true connections enhance and benefit us, and others as well. Woven throughout are personal anecdotes and experiences, which let us know that she is real—she shares her apprehensions along with her successes. The reader will identify with the dimensions of connections in a journey that is rewarding and soul stirring.

—Dr. Marie Johnson, retired education professor, Freed-Hardeman University, Henderson, Tennessee

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Recognize the Need to Belong

Julia was supposed to be working on a study of the “one another” passages for her Sunday morning Bible class, but she just couldn’t stop thinking about something Viola had said in Bible class the night before. Where did Viola get that thought she shared? Why had it stuck in Julia’s mind? Viola had observed, *Sometimes the Lord calms the storm. Sometimes he lets the storm rage and calms his child.*

Viola seemed to live a storm-free life. With two children doing well in school and being generally liked by everyone, and with a husband who spoke kindly to her, Viola was always smiling, always patient. *What does she know about storms?* Julia wondered.

As she chewed on her pencil, Julia realized she didn’t really know Viola, even though the two women chatted frequently and had many opportunities to be together. Julia mused, *Viola always makes me feel valued. But now that I think about it, I don’t know anything about her. She never talks about herself or shows any side of herself except the giving, listening side. She seems to live the “one another” passages for others, but no one can live them for her, because she doesn’t seem to*



need prayers or comfort or help with burdens—she doesn't seem to have any burdens.

Julia's thoughts stalled for a moment or two. Then: *If Viola wasn't busy in the congregation, she would be invisible. We see her because she's always there, but we don't really see her; we see what she does.*



Bind Us Together is not about friendships. It is about connections—like being connected to the internet or like connecting to a caller on the phone. You can be in the same room with a computer that has internet access, but until you take the steps to connect, the internet remains only an opportunity. You may dial someone on the phone, but until that person picks up and says hello, the telephone remains only a tool, a prop, or a paper weight. It takes two to make a connection. While connections can lead to friendships, we can also be connected and have relationships without those relationships being BFFs (best friends forever).



Paths Crossing vs. Connecting

This book will help you distinguish between “being adjacent” and “having a connection,” like the difference between tossing a magnet onto a wooden table and tossing it onto a metal surface. On the wooden table the magnet is merely adjacent, but on a metal surface it connects. On any given day we may be adjacent to others without being connected to them. Like tiles on a Scrabble board, we can be adjacent and productive, but not connected. Connection requires a knowledge and understanding of each other. In the body of Christ we need to be like the magnet looking for metal surfaces with which to connect or the metal surface

to which a magnet may connect. This book is about how to transform an encounter into a connection.



Dissolve the Dividing Lines

Writing is hard work for me, but I am compelled to write because I have something to say. I need to say it because I have learned that connecting is vital. Contrary to popular belief, relationships don't just happen. Most of the time, true bonding develops only if we initiate and follow through. I am convicted to share these lessons because of personal experiences and the experiences of others in some congregations. Some smaller congregations contain a majority of members who are kinfolk—many “McCoys” and a few “not-McCoys.” Walk into the auditorium and stop behind that last pew. You can almost see the dividing line. The McCoys and the not-McCoys never connected with each other, never blended into one body. These churches often become extinct.

I know of two congregations with opposite situations. One outgrew the church building; the other was small in number and could barely afford the payments on a large building. The two congregations made an agreement to use the same building at the same time. I won't use the word “merge” because they didn't. People in town gossiped about the battles that went on in the building, in the parking lot, and in business meetings. The new congregation housed four hundred members. Within a few years, it numbered fewer than a hundred. The two never merged; they never became one.

Connection (from Latin. *connexio* “to fasten together, to tie, join together”): A line of communication between two points.

Synonyms: Acquaintance, agent, ally, association, contact, friend, go-between, intermediary, kin, kindred, kinship, mentor, messenger, network, reciprocity, relation, relative, sponsor.

On the other hand, consider the thriving congregation whose members loved and supported each other. They were a family looking out for one another. One day they became convicted that they needed to look outward and serve the community. They went to work with a will, establishing clothing giveaways, a food pantry, and a counseling service. It was beautiful! Then they became “fishers of men,” and they were good at it. They were catching “fish,” throwing them into the boat, and then catching more and throwing them into the boat. The newly caught fish either learned to live in abandonment on the bottom of the boat or they died. And we all know that there is not much water in a boat. The old members spent little or no time showing new converts their place in the body and how to fulfill it.

Keep in mind that in each of these dividing line examples, women composed approximately two-thirds of the group.



Times are changing, of course, but historically, women are best at building relationships. How does that fact make a woman significant in linking the members of a congregation to each other?

Most congregations have members who are not seen because they enter the assembly at the last minute and leave immediately after the last amen. Is it because the local church provides no opportunity to connect during the time they should most look like a body? Other members participate in various programs of the church, so we know them for what they do, but we cannot practice the “exhort, comfort, and bear one another’s burdens” commands because they close themselves away from opportunities to be served. They don’t share their needs.

I am motivated to write because I’ve seen too many Christians who have no bond with the group wander away. Their

backsliding is not necessarily because they have lost their faith; they may still believe in God. But perhaps they failed to experience communion with fellow Christians and with the Godhead—the very reason God directs us to assemble, to be an active part of the body of Christ.

I'm writing these lessons in hope that you will recognize yourself as a significant part of the body of Christ. I pray that you will see the following traits in your future:

- 👤 *Look at and listen to your neighbors.* See them. Hear them. Recognize their greatest need is for Christ. Be his eyes, ears, hands, and feet.
- 👤 *Look at and listen to your brothers and sisters in Christ.* You do not have to become best friends with everyone you meet. No one has the time, energy, or resources for that. What you do need to do will cost you a little time, a little thought, and all your love for God—all your appreciation for what he has done for you.



How Is Your Vision?

I pray that this study will provoke you to think about the invisible ones in your congregation. Are you, as a branch, firmly connected to the Vine? Do you see the church as a body in which each member is significant and needs to be firmly connected?

There aren't many original thoughts in my head, so don't count on me to tell you a lot of new methods. Rather, I am sharing experiences gathered from others along the way and from my own trials and errors. So far I have lived in nine states and one foreign country. Spending so much time among strangers, I recognized my urgent need for learning how to bond with others. So every time I heard an idea, saw a successful connection developing, read a relevant book or article, or saw an action demonstrating a bond forming, I noted it and dropped the idea into a

file folder. The book you hold in your hands is a result of that gathering. I give credit where possible. If there is something here that I learned from you and did not give you credit, I welcome a note from you saying, “I taught you that!” Truly, I would love the connection!

Why might you be interested in this study? Perhaps you are new to a community or organization and you need to make new friends and don’t know how to start. Or perhaps you have been in a group for a long time and often think about reaching out to people you barely know, but don’t know how or you have been afraid to or you just haven’t made the commitment. Perhaps you are nervous around strangers and are hoping to find a “how to” list of things to do. Most importantly, you might be convinced as Paul was: “knowing the fear of the Lord” you wish to persuade others (2 Corinthians 5:11). There are many reasons to invest in learning to forge links with others.



Without connections, after the day’s work is done, life can be lonely. Who comes to mind that might be receptive to developing a bond with you?



We live such busy lives we hardly have time to say hello to those we meet, much less connect with them in a meaningful way. How is this contrary to God’s way?



There is so much stimulation in our lives that it is difficult to focus on a single matter for more than a few minutes. We must learn to concentrate on those in need. Name one way to be more aware of the needs of others.



In our economy, many people work two jobs to care for their families. When they finally grab a few minutes free of urgent tasks, they are usually too tired to reach out to strangers. How and where can a busy worker take time to form a kinship with members of the body?



Some people are ashamed of their past. They believe anyone who gets to know them will reject them, so why should they bother making an effort. How can you meet their needs and become a person they can trust?



Job changes and relocations bring us to new communities, cultures, and circumstances, and we are fearful. Does that fear excuse us from making an effort? How can we learn to bond with others?



Every happening, great and small, is a parable whereby God speaks to us, and the art of life is to get the message.

—Malcolm Muggeridge, British Journalist



Mentor Material

Connecting might be easy for you. You might be comfortable with all the assignment choices provided in these pages. Wonderful! But you might find some of the assignments out of your comfort zone. Don't worry. Just do what you can. As with yoga, any effort at all is productive. Participating outside of class and in class will bless you and others. Discussing or sharing your thoughts in class has a twofold benefit.

1. Discussion helps others understand their own experience a little better.
2. Sharing will benefit you in clarifying the process in your own mind.

Sometimes you don't know what you think until you say it out loud. No one is born knowing everything. Don't we all learn through reading, watching, and hearing? When you share your experiences with others doing this study, you are mentoring. Thank you for being a mentor.



Growth Requires Focus

To get better at anything, you must focus. Your assignments will provide an opportunity to focus on seeing and hearing the souls around you. Perhaps you have been thinking about getting to

know visitors and new members. Let the ideas in these lessons help you focus.

Having moved many times in my life and having left good friends behind, I learned again and again how to create and build new friendships. Some find it easy to initiate conversations and relationships, but for me it is not easy. However, without the bonds of friendship, life is barren. In the past, while waiting for “adjacent” to become “connection,” I became discouraged and occasionally depressed.

Learn to lean on your divine connection when you feel discouraged. Remember, there’s a balance. Continue to strengthen your relationship with God as you cultivate new human relationships. Both connections are vital for good mental, emotional, spiritual, and physical health. Let the word of God inspire you: “Jesus kept increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men” (Luke 2:52 NASB).



Like everyone else, I feel the need of relations and friendship, of affection, of friendly interaction, and I am not made of stone or iron, so I cannot miss these things without feeling a void and deep need.

—Vincent van Gogh, Dutch Painter



A Place to Belong

We want to belong. We crave companionship and intimacy. Experiences of being loved stay with us. They affect who we are and who we become. When others love us and we love others, we are in a win-win situation.



Write your thoughts about the obvious bond of Jesus with Lazarus, Martha, and Mary. As with all relationships, theirs must have begun with seeing and hearing each other. Make up a story about their very first meeting.



Write Proverbs 18:24. How may a friend give more of a “place to belong” to you than a brother?



I believe the greatest gift I can conceive of having from anyone is to be seen by them, heard by them, to be understood and touched by them.

—Virginia Satir, American Psychologist and Educator



Do you sometimes feel totally alone? The more you know about that kind of moment, the better you can handle it when it occurs again—and it will occur again. Describe one of those moments, using the following questions, but don’t limit your description to these points.

👤 What time of day or night did it occur?

👤 What happened just before the moment?

👤 How did you react to the feeling?

✎ While your experience is fresh in your mind, describe how it feels to share a bond of friendship.



Eye-Openers

Some years ago, Karen Mains wrote an article for *Today's Christian Woman* magazine: "Falling in Love with Scripture Again." She addressed those who read the Bible but get nothing out of it. She suggested we "give [ourselves] time and space for falling in love" with scripture. She recommended that the readers choose "one passage and spend weeks, months, maybe even a year in it." I said earlier that everything I know I learned from someone else. The quote above stands alone on a notecard in my manuscript folder. However, because I took her advice, I can recall the gist of her plan:

1. Choose a passage.
2. Read it for several weeks, sometimes aloud.

3. Use inductive reasoning to determine the writer's point. (It might be a promise, an intention, an example of behavior, or an illustration of God's character.)
4. Write down the passage.
5. Memorize the passage.

Why did I drop this note on studying scripture into my working folder on connecting with others? And why am I sharing it with you? Because the principles of learning to love the scripture also apply to forming bonds with each other.

✞ Choose someone as a potential friend, and give yourself time and space for "falling in love." How do you get to know that person over time?

✞ Remember important bits of information such as birthdates and children's names. Make a note of them if you need to. Writing something down is not cheating. Think about what is happening between you and the person with whom you are trying to connect.



What to Expect

Chapters 5 through 12 are designed specifically to train you to take notice of everyone in your congregation or in your community. Allow at least a week per assignment. Don't choose a different person for each assignment. Limit your interactions to a

few people, no more than three or four for the entire study. The purpose is to connect with them—not to bump into them and then bounce off.

Each chapter presents three or four options. You may choose one or all of them. You will be asked to think before you act and again after you have completed the assignment. After the fourth assignment, you will be asked to evaluate the progress. Then you will spend some time at the end of the study to consider the results and think about your future plans.

Be aware of results as you complete the assignments. You will be asked to discuss your feelings in class or with a trusted friend. Meditating and discussing will help you internalize what you are learning. Then you will become more comfortable in reaching out. Becky Horton, in a presentation at a Southern Africa Bible College lectureship, said, “Thinking out loud helps us disentangle our thoughts.” This material provides questions to get you started thinking, and you will be asked to think out loud.



Sharpen Your Skills

If you don't seem to have difficulty making connections but are part of a class using this book, your life-experiences should make it easier to choose assignments and to complete them. It might also be easier for you to share with the class the significance of what happens between two people in the initial stages of friendship. Your experiences are unique, but your comments might trigger another's understanding. God bless you in this opportunity to be supportive of someone who is learning to include others rather than to pass them by.

The purpose of this study is to help each student learn to develop her own bonds. World-class connectors will be encouraged to recognize their success and understand why they are successful. I pray that you will sharpen your plug-in skills and share your experiences. Remember, sharing helps to clarify

thoughts. If you have mastered the art of relationship building, I pray that you will share your experiences and be a mentor.

While you are busy choosing a person with whom to connect, you might find that someone in the class has chosen you. What a blessing that can be! Please be open and available. Be responsive. Be prayerful. Thank you for receiving so that others may practice connection. Receiving is an excellent opportunity to focus on kinship from the perspective of receiving. I wish I could be there to hear your discussions!



The Most Important Connection

Ask God for help as you work your way through this book. Commit to being genuine, discreet, and open for the long haul. This book may be a 13-week class or a few days' reading, but relationships are an ongoing process. This book is not written by an expert, so you will probably be able to expand on the thoughts and suggestions made in it. If you think of a better idea, use it! Let this study be only the starting place for you.

Begin with prayer for yourself and for those to whom you will be reaching out. At this moment you may not know who these people are, but God knows. Pray for yourself and for them. Begin to pray for those who will try to initiate a connection with you. As I developed the manuscript for this book, I prayed for you as one who is reaching out and also as one to whom others are reaching out.

Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need (Hebrews 4:16).



Shine Your Light

Are you one of the few people who doesn't need this book? Creating a bridge appears to be easy for some people. You will find

yourself in some of these lessons, because part of what I have learned came from watching you. Perhaps some of the assignment choices will not seem uncomfortable to you, and you may even wonder, “Why do we need to think about creating connections with others?” Here are two reasons:

1. You will find it easier to focus on someone in your congregation you have not noticed before.
2. You will have an opportunity to share your knowledge, experience, and enthusiasm for meeting and greeting others.

On the other hand, you might be one of many people like me who feel disconnected but find it very difficult to start the process. You may begin this process of connecting immediately by listening to the announcements during the next assembly. Take note of people and their needs. For example, Diane Smith is scheduled for surgery on Tuesday. Do you know Diane? If not, your first step is painless. Put a name to a face and a face to a name. Begin to see souls. Identify Diane and begin to pray for her.

Regardless of your past attitudes about meeting someone for the first time, you can let your light shine during this quarter of study! Don’t hide it under a bushel.



If the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous person avails much, what does silence do?

—Unknown



Find a scripture that motivates you to take the first step in making sure all members of the body of Christ are included.



It is one of the beautiful compensations
of this life that no one can sincerely try to
help another without helping himself.

—Charles Dudley Warner, American Author/Essayist



Open Your Eyes

Viola spent her days, and most nights, happily serving her husband, their children, and the church in every way she could. After all, she was the preacher's wife. Breakfasts and dinners were sit-down meals around the table where news was exchanged. She taught Bible class on Sundays, Tuesday mornings, and Wednesday nights. She created bulletin boards. Members of the congregation often dropped by for visits.

Through most days Viola wore a smile. But nights? Well, nights were often difficult. While she was up and working, she worked "as unto the Lord" and was content. Anyone watching her probably thought she was sailing through life with no problems. But at night Viola faced the reality that she was alone. There was a secret in her life she dared not share. She believed that if people knew her secret, life would be unbearable. The only way to be sure you don't tell a secret—or let something slip that can give an attentive person a clue—is to keep quiet. So Viola kept quiet. She became an excellent and sympathetic listener but shared nothing beyond recipes and hobbies. So at night she cried because she was surrounded by good people but was totally alone.

