

CONNECTING POINT

VOLUME 25, FALL 2020

Magazine

*The light shines in the darkness, and
the darkness has not overcome it.*

John 1:5 (NIV)

A KINGDOM WHICH CANNOT BE SHAKEN

WITH 2020 PRESENTING GREAT CHALLENGES, WE GO BACK
TO SOME OF THE ESSAYS FROM THE PAST
TO FIND HOPE FOR THE PRESENT

ARTICLE:
WHEN SHADOWS FLEE

Despite the challenges we see in our world today, God is at work and the forces of darkness will not overcome the Church of Jesus Christ.

ARTICLE:
OUR COVENANT OF PEACE

Christ died, not only to secure the forgiveness of our sins, but our peace as well. Peace is the believer's portion.

ARTICLE:
MORE BLESSED

Jesus told us that it is more blessed to give than to receive. Sometimes the live of giving can be the most effective ministry.

FIRST WORD:

THE THINGS THAT NEVER LAST

There are those among us who fear that we might have genuinely lost our republic. Between fears of a rigged election and the strident secularism that we see dominating much of the cultural landscape, it feels like something is irreparably slipping away from us. I can sympathize with these sentiments. However, it is wrong to despair. Neither the Kingdom of God nor the Church of Jesus Christ are going anywhere. Both are built upon an unshakable foundation that will never pass away.

The eternal verities upon which you and I have staked our lives remain unchanged by the corruption that has infected our government or the progressive ideologies that have



infiltrated our culture. That's not to say that our nation has not suffered loss or that we should not take seriously the threats we face in our times. I just know that they will not have the last word.

Paul was able to keep hope even in the midst of great pressure. He was able to do this because, as he said, "we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal." (see 2 Corinthians 4:17-18). The circumstances we see presently, as terrible as they may sometimes seem, are not permanent. They are temporal realities that will not last. What *will* last is our hope, for it is founded upon the Person and finished work of Jesus Christ. Thus, our hope is sure and our future secure. So, while we witness things that may at times test our faith, they will not endure. They are of this world: temporary and fleeting. We are members of a heavenly Kingdom that shall never pass away, so in that sense, we are as far above

our troubles as the heavens are above the earth. The challenge for us is to see ourselves from position in Christ, for, as Paul tells us, we are "(seated) together in heaven places in Christ Jesus" (see Ephesians 2:6).

As we have tried to emphasize over the last six years that we have been publishing Connecting Point Magazine, truth is immutable and eternal. The same God who fixed the laws that govern the movements of the stars and planets has also laid the foundations of truth and goodness and hardwired them into our universe. Everything else is just passing through.

The writer of the Hebrews said it well: "Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. For our God is a consuming fire" (Hebrews 12:28-29). May we seek to build upon that foundation with "gold, silver, and precious stones" that our work may endure for His glory.

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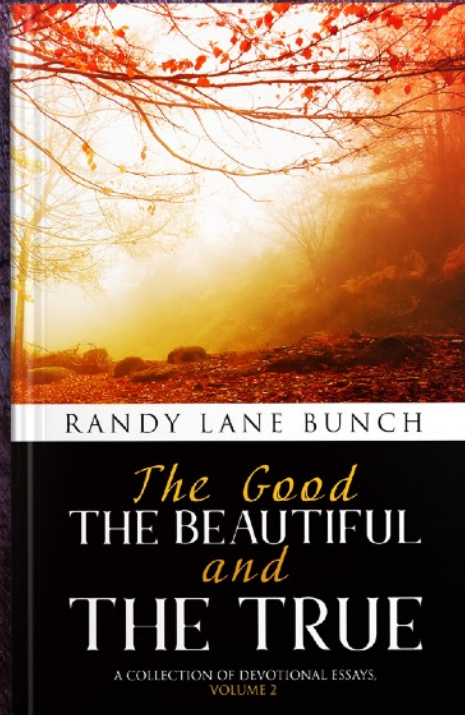
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WHEN SHADOWS FLEE

**THE LIGHT SHINES IN THE DARKNESS,
AND THE DARKNESS DOESN'T EXTINGUISH THE
LIGHT. (JOHN 1:5 COMMON ENGLISH BIBLE)**

In a culture war that may seem to have more casualties than victories, the Church of Jesus Christ can be assured of one thing: the darkness does not extinguish the light. Jesus said something similar when He said of the Church, "the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it" (Matthew 16:18). This passage from John, however, predates the Church or even the Garden of Eden. It speaks of the very primal forces that were unleashed in the creation of the universe when the Word of God broke into the dark nothingness with a burst of energy and light that brought all matter, space, and time into existence. The darkness could not keep the light at bay, and it still can't.

For some of us, recent news may feel like Déjà vu. The Church has once again been rocked by scandal in both the Catholic and Protestant worlds, with allegations of sexual misconduct tarnishing the reputations of an ancient Christian institution and a famous evangelical mega-church. Both the scandal and the failure of leaders to properly respond have added insult to injury for the victims and their families, as well as providing fodder for the late-night talk show hosts and other media outlets who are all too happy to attack an already beleaguered American Church.

The ongoing battle of *Masterpiece Cakeshop* owner, Jack Phillips, continues as he is once again obliged to stand

against a government agency threatening his religious liberties, despite his recent victory in the United States Supreme Court. Religious pluralism in our culture is now taken not only to mean equality in the marketplace of ideas but equality in every sense of the word, making any Faith that claims to be THE truth a narrow, intolerant, and possibly even "dangerous" ideology. This allegation is usually aimed at Christianity, regardless of the fact that all religions make exclusive truth claims of their own. If anyone wonders if this is an unfair assessment, one only has to think back to the last time a Muslim baker had to go before the Colorado State Civil Rights Commission for refusing to bake a cake for a same-sex wedding. Exactly.

Far more serious than any of these minor attacks against the Church in the west is the reality of religious persecution currently going on in the Middle East, Africa, and nations such as North Korea. Barbaric attacks against Christians have included the brutal slaughter of innocents by militant Jihadist Muslim groups such as Boko Haram in Nigeria. A veritable Christian genocide has been going on in Syria and Iraq against Christians whose numbers have dramatically dwindled over recent years due to violent persecution which includes rape, beheadings, and even crucifixions.

With all of this, one may think the world of Christendom is weakening under the load, but such an appraisal would be wrong indeed. While it is true that the Church in America is waning somewhat in its influence, the Church in the global south is thriving. Even more amazing is a recent report that the underground Church in Iran is the fastest growing underground Church movement (along with China, which is expected to have more Christians than the United States by 2030). It is commonly acknowledged among Christians working in Muslim areas that many are converting to Christianity through dreams, visions, and miracles. God is moving, and neither the headlines of secular newspapers nor the crass, cynical humor of the purveyors of late-night, anti-Christian talk shows are slowing Him down. It is like the tale of Narnia in which the White Witch's seemingly interminable winter is beginning to give way to a new spring, bringing rejoicing to the poor, oppressed inhabitants of the land. "Aslan is on the move," and winter will not remain forever. The darkness does not extinguish the light.

What has happened in the west in general and the United States in particular has not made the Church weak – rather it has exposed the weakness that was already present. Peter warned us that judgment must "begin at the house of God" (1 Peter 4:17), and if the recent scandals serve to alert us to the need for a revival of Christian character in the Church, then at least some good can come out of an otherwise tragic season. The need for authenticity is greater than ever, as is the need for both clarity and creativity in sharing the truth of the gospel. There is great reason to be hopeful. Reports of God's soon demise in the west have been greatly exaggerated, no matter how hopeful the heralds of doom may be. The darkness does not extinguish the light.

Instead of a handful of celebrity preachers who are all too often set up for failure due to the high perch upon which they are placed by adoring acolytes, we need all believers to assume their posts and use their gifts for the work of the

Kingdom. Many hands make light work, and if we're all serving in our area of giftedness, the labor is both fruitful and delightful. We need those who will share with friends and co-workers. We need writers and bloggers. We need those who can creatively use social and conventional media, as well as those who are called to support all such efforts with their finances and prayers. In short, we need every member the body of Christ functioning, with all the varied parts taking in their place in this great work. The Church is not a cruise ship with a few doing the work while the rest enjoy the amenities. Rather, we are to be

more like a battleship, with all hands on deck and each knowing their respective tasks.

Most of all, we need to remember from whom flows the necessary grace and strength. We

need once again to come to God humbly, contritely, and earnestly, remembering that no work of our hands is capable of succeeding apart from His initiative and blessing. That, along with a restoration of the love that Christ commanded we demonstrate to one another, will restore the Church's influence in ways no human program or state of the art gospel media presentation ever could. We don't need more pizzazz. We need more prayer. We don't need more television time. We need more *carpet* time, with faces pressed to the floor, humbly asking that the God who answers by fire might show His power to our nation once again. It may feel that the Church has been stripped of its influence and made a laughingstock, but like Samson in his humiliation, the hair can begin to grow once more (see Judges 16:22).

God is a God of restoration and revival, and as He has done so many times before, He will visit His Church in power if we seek Him. The darkness does not extinguish the light, but when that light shines dim the way of truth is obscured, and false gods are erected to replace the One who seems to have been misplaced by a neglectful Church. You and I are the vessels through whom His light shines in a darkened world. The clearer and cleaner we stand before Him, the brighter His light will shine to show a lost world the way of salvation.

The need for authenticity is greater than ever, as is the need for both clarity and creativity in sharing the truth of the gospel.

OUR COVENANT OF PEACE

THE CHASTISEMENT FOR OUR PEACE
WAS UPON HIM, (ISAIAH 53:5)

Almost anything is for sale today. In our supply and demand, consumer-minded society, there is little that cannot be obtained for a price. In fact, perhaps nothing reflects the moral status of a society more than the free-market. People can rage against the pornographer or the drug dealer, but the fact remains that the only reason they are in business is because of the demand society has placed upon their product. Regulation alone will never curb man's sinful impulse. Only a life transformed through the power of Christ can do that.

Nevertheless, there are some things that cannot be bought on the market at any price. One of those things is peace. If there was ever a product that would guarantee to make the seller a millionaire overnight, it would be a pill or potion that could provide true, instant and sustained peace. One might even say that drug trafficking – the fastest growing crime worldwide – is a result of man's attempt to intoxicate himself out of the reality of life's struggles into some kind of peaceful state. Sarah McLaughlin's beautiful lilting song, *In The Arms Of The Angel*, is about the escape people try to find through the needle. One section of the lyrics says it like this:

*I need some distraction
Oh, beautiful release*

Memories seep from my veins

And maybe empty

Oh, and weightless, and maybe

I'll find some peace tonight

It is a false peace that merely blurs the lines of reality, allowing a temporary anesthetizing to life's pain, but never removing the root of the problem. Rather, the problems become compounded by the terrible price paid, not only by the individuals who are bound in the chains of addiction, but by their families and, ultimately, by society as a whole. The very fact that people take such drastic measures to find some sort of reprieve from the reality they can't seem to face, demonstrates the need man has for peace.

Enter Jesus. It was His death upon the cross that laid the foundation for our peace. Regardless of one's religious convictions or absence thereof, it is not difficult to see that something is wrong with the world. Things are not as they should be. Even atheists, who do not allow for a transcendent moral order, struggle to understand human suffering and senseless violence. We know it's wrong. The world is broken, and it is only the Christian worldview that gives us a coherent answer as to why things are as they are.

God did not make the world a chaotic, violent place. He made the paradise man would live in before forming him from the dust of the earth. There was nothing missing or broken in the Garden. Man was at peace with his Maker and himself. However, man also had a free will. The gift of freedom is necessary if we are to be anything more than a robot dancing to divine will. Only with freedom of choice can there be real love. Love and loyalty must be given. It cannot be coerced or demanded. If you know the story of the Garden, you know that man's choice to rebel against God ended in his spiritual death and separation from God. Though God would make a way of reconciliation through Christ, the consequences of man's choice could not be completely reversed. Adam and Eve immediately knew that the unbroken fellowship with God they had enjoyed was lost and replaced by fear and shame. They knew they were naked and hid themselves from God, clumsily trying to cover their inadequacy with fig leaves. God, however, clothed them with the skin of an animal, revealing in type and shadow that the nakedness of our fallen condition could only ever be covered by blood.

It was Christ who ultimately came to earth to be the final sacrifice for sin, bridging the gap between a holy God and sinful man. Now by faith we are justified (made right with God), and our peace with Him restored (see Romans 5:1). It is this peace with God that serves as the foundation for peace in every other circumstance of life. David put it this way:

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,

I will fear no evil;

For You are with me; (Psalms 23:4)

I can go through just about anything in life if I know I have God on my side. Even death itself loses its sting when we have the assurance of a life beyond the grave in a place of perfect peace in His presence forever. I have performed many funerals in my thirty plus years of ministry, and I have been at

the gravesides and mourned the loss of both family and friends. However, I can tell you without hesitation that the joy that comes from the assurance of knowing we have peace with God, both now and in the life to come, makes all the difference in the world. Without such assurance, we are bereft of hope, but with it we have an abiding and ultimate hope.

Christians face the same challenges non-Christians do, but the difference is in knowing we don't face any of them alone. We have a God who loves us enough that He paid our debt and reconciled us to Himself that He might hold us close, in both good times and bad. For this reason, I never want to

take a step out of His purpose for my life and forfeit such wonderful peace. These are tempestuous times, and no one has the assurance that things are going to get better in this world. In fact, Jesus assured us otherwise. He said, "These things

I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

I spend a lot of time arguing for the Christian worldview. I am privileged to teach Christian apologetics, which is the defense of the Christian faith. There are a lot of good arguments to persuade the skeptic, but in the end, it is this existential argument of my experience of peace in the midst of life's storms that, to me, is the most compelling. You can't find that in the bottom of a bottle or on the wrong end of a needle. You can't find it in job security or success. Some of the world's best and brightest, who had attained to the dizzying heights of success, have taken their own lives because they could not find this one missing element of peace in their soul.

Peace is the province and provision of God. It belongs freely to His children. In a world full of so much uncertainty, I can think of little better to recommend my God to you. The path to Him is narrow. It is, in fact, found only through the person of Jesus Christ (see John 14:6). It is through Him and Him alone that our ransom was paid and God's peace secured.

The gift of freedom is necessary if we are to be anything more than a robot dancing to divine will. Only with freedom of choice can there be real love. Love and loyalty must be given. It cannot be coerced or demanded.

MORE BLESSED

I HAVE SHOWN YOU IN EVERY WAY, BY LABORING LIKE THIS, THAT YOU MUST SUPPORT THE WEAK. AND REMEMBER THE WORDS OF THE LORD JESUS, THAT HE SAID, "IT IS *MORE BLESSED* TO GIVE THAN TO RECEIVE." (ACTS 20:35)



When it comes to the holidays in general, and Christmas in particular, it seems like they create more and more frustration every year. It seems we don't enjoy the Christmas cheer the way we used to in America. I love Christmas. Much of it, no doubt, is the nostalgic feelings that are attached to it in my heart and mind: the songs, the lights, the feelings of hearth and home, families coming together, and kindnesses shown that are all too rare at other times of the year.

It's a time of giving and receiving. Jesus had something to say about those two things. He said one was more blessed than the other. I think we have this reversed much of the time. Who doesn't like receiving? But, needless to say, the Lord of glory knows some things we don't. He said it was "more blessed to give than to receive." These words, quoted in this passage by Paul, are not found in the gospels, and thus, they were most likely preserved and passed down by the apostles and others who spent much time with the Master. I'm glad these words of His in particular were preserved, because I believe they hold the key to real fulfillment in this life.

In reality, ministry and service to God is all about giving away what God has given us. The apostle Paul tells us, "Moreover it is required in stewards that one be found faithful" (1 Corinthians 4:2). A steward is one who has been entrusted with the goods of another, and every one of us who are

believers in Christ Jesus have been entrusted with some measure of God's goods to minister to others. In fact, Paul tells us elsewhere, "But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift" (Ephesians 4:7). In this context, "grace" is referring to the special abilities God has entrusted to each member of His body by which we are to minister to others. We all have something to impart, and God has called us to steward well the abilities He's entrusted to us, as the apostle Peter reminded us when he said, "As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God" (1 Peter 4:10).

There is nothing more fulfilling than using what God has given us to strengthen and encourage others. I have been on both the giving and receiving side of life, and what I have discovered is that it is only as we mature that we really understand the blessedness of giving. When we are young, be it naturally or spiritually, we are more interested in receiving. Certainly, on some level this is necessary, since we can only give to others what we ourselves have received. We need to be good receivers, hungry for everything God has for us, so we can learn, mature, and develop in our ability to bless others. Too often, however, we underestimate our ability to give, thinking that we have to be gifted like someone else in order to truly be a blessing, when really the key is simply to give what we have.

Recently, as I was returning home from work, I had a very unusual experience. As I was praying quietly regarding our church service that night and what I was to minister, the Lord spoke to me. The words came quite unbidden to my mind, "Shattered dreams." I had hardly a moment to ponder the words before they came again to my mind, "Shattered dreams." After those words, the Lord began to speak to me further about this. The last words that came to me were, "I will restore your dreams." That phrase was repeated to my heart three times.

I have had God speak to me any number of times regarding life and ministry, but this somehow seemed significant. I wondered if the words referred to someone I would minister to in the service that night, or if somehow they pertained to me. When I got home, I wrote the words down in my journal, and told the Lord, "You know, Lord, I may not have everything I want in life where my dreams are concerned, but I have a blessed life." I didn't really think too much more about it as I had to get ready for the service.

That night, just as I was beginning my message, a homeless man walked into our church. This is nothing new. Due to where we are located, they do so periodically, and we are always glad to have them come in out of the cold (or heat, depending on the time of year). My wife is always quick to give them a cup of coffee, even if they are just passing by outside our doors. This man quietly dozed through most of the message, not disturbing anyone, and he was still sleeping when we were about ready to lock up. One of our men spoke to him, and I offered him a cup of coffee to go. He also took a bottled water, and when I stepped outside later, he was still there. He asked me if perhaps I had a jacket he could have. I didn't have one, but my wife had a blanket in her car which she gave him.

Judging by his appearance, it seemed that his homeless status was relatively new; just a man who had fallen on hard times and was trying to negotiate his situation and, as he put it, "Stay out of trouble." Like many, he was struggling with some issues that had very likely brought him to this place in life.

Our church is very interested in helping the disadvantaged, and our people are very generous in reaching out to the needy, both locally and in other parts of the world. This has been a particular emphasis of late, and so before we even got home, my wife and I had decided to put a care package together to give to our new friend. We found an old backpack in a cupboard, put some food and a thermos of coffee in it, and I found one of my old jackets that I knew would serve him well. My only concern was whether I would be able to find

him again. He had told us he was staying in an alcove between two nearby stores.

It wasn't until I was in the car heading back to find my friend that God reminded me of the words He has spoken to me earlier in the day. I believe those words were for this man. God is the restorer of our shattered dreams. Whether one lives in a Penthouse on Park Avenue or in

We need to be good receivers, hungry for everything God has for us, so we can learn, mature, and develop in our ability to bless others. Too often, however, we underestimate our ability to give, thinking that we have to be gifted like someone else in order to truly be a blessing, when really the key is simply to give what we have.

the alcove between two stores, we all need the God who can heal our hurts, restore our broken dreams, and give us hope again. I have had the privilege of serving God in different ways over the years, but nothing I've ever done was more important than when, finding my friend wrapped in my wife's blanket, I got down on one knee and presented him with that backpack and my old jacket. I told him it had been a favorite of mine that had kept me warm once on a ministry trip to India. It was true. Somehow I wanted him to know that it wasn't just any old jacket, but a special jacket, because he was special. It really is more blessed to give than to receive.

LAST WORD: FOR SUCH A TIME AS THIS



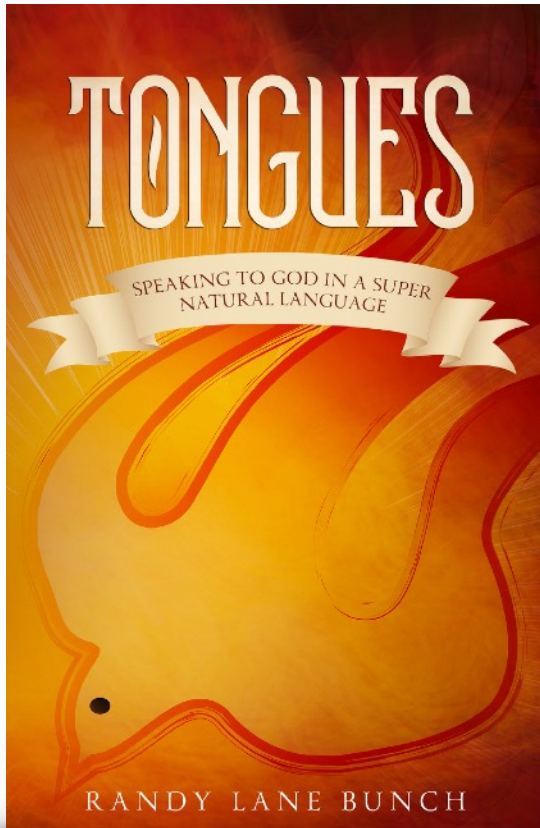
AND MORDECAI TOLD THEM TO ANSWER ESTHER: "DO NOT THINK IN YOUR HEART THAT YOU WILL ESCAPE IN THE KING'S PALACE ANY MORE THAN ALL THE OTHER JEWS. FOR IF YOU REMAIN COMPLETELY SILENT AT THIS TIME, RELIEF AND DELIVERANCE WILL ARISE FOR THE JEWS FROM ANOTHER PLACE, BUT YOU AND YOUR FATHER'S HOUSE WILL PERISH. YET WHO KNOWS WHETHER YOU HAVE COME TO THE KINGDOM FOR SUCH A TIME AS THIS?" (ESTHER 4:13-14)

Most of us are probably pretty familiar with Mordecai's exhortation to Esther to use her position to fulfill the purpose for which God had placed her in the palace to begin with. What is intriguing to me about this passage, however, is that it also comes with a warning about what will happen to her should she refuse to act. We know that all it takes for evil to thrive is for good men and women to do nothing. This has never been more true than in our day. Whether we're talking about living our lives out loud as believers, letting our witness be seen and heard, or fulfilling our responsibility to engage with culture on a larger scale, the Church cannot fulfill her duty to the King of Kings by inactivity.

One of the facts we see from history is that what *made* great men and women was their ability to see the need of their times and rise up to meet it. William Wilberforce and the abolition of the slave trade, the Founders of our nation, the Greet Generation which fought WWII: all of these are examples of those who heard the call, saw the need, and used their talents, whether great or small, to fight injustice, meet the need of the moment, and see the victory won.

My encouragement to all of us is to go and do likewise! The need of our nation is great and our labors in the harvest fields of the world is not yet done. Hear the call, see the need, and let's see the victory won!

CLEAR TEACHING ON A CONTROVERSIAL SUBJECT



There is perhaps no subject that has suffered more abuse than speaking with other tongues, and yet it holds the promise of great spiritual blessing, both to the individual believer as well as to the body of Christ in general. Sharing from both the Word of God and his own experience, Dr. Randy Lane Bunch helps to shed scriptural light on what has been for many a confusing issue.

If you have had questions on this important Bible subject, this book will help to answer those questions and give much needed insight as to how to have God's power in your life. To purchase your copy of *Tongues: Speaking To God In A Supernatural Language*, simple go online to Amazon, Barnes & Noble, or Apple iBooks. (Paperback available only through Amazon). You can also find links on the website, at randylanebunch.org.

Connecting Point Communications

The website for **Connecting Point Communications** is found at randylanebunch.org, and contains links to the Connecting Point Podcast, Dr. Randy's Blog, Connecting Point Magazine, and much more! This ministry website is designed to provide a rich, comprehensive media ministry experience. The resources (except for Dr. Randy's books) are free and updated regularly. Remember, Dr. Randy is available to speak at your church or ministry event. To contact him, simply email him at info@connectinpc.org.

Connecting Point Church

Connecting Point Church is the name of the church that Dr. Randy and his wife, Maria, pastor in their home town of Taft, California. Additionally, they lead **North East Christian Church** on the northeast side of Bakersfield, California (nechristian.net). The church website, connectingpc.org, contains some of the content Dr. Randy's personal site has, along with directions to the church and service times. You can contact us via email at info@connectingpc.org to request Dr. Randy to speak at your church or ministry event.

