

Connect the Dots

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A hundred years ago I could have asked you if your dinner had any connection to a family in Central America and you could honestly have said, “There is no connection.” Today the same answer would not be true. Take for instance, this avocado. The other night, my household had guacamole dip at dinner time. This sticker says we had a connection to Mexico. And the corn chips...sure, they were made with American corn, but only because our agricultural policies gave it unfair market advantage. Once again, our meal was connected, though indirectly, to some Mexican family.

In the past century, our world has become vastly more interconnected as factors of globalization draw previously unrelated regions and events and objects and people into contact with one another. A nineteenth century family may have been able to eat and go to church and heat their house with very few connections of consequence to people and communities half way across the country or even on the other side of the globe.

We no longer have that option to live autonomously; our contexts of living affect all other humans in this globalized world. No action or event in our lives is isolated solely to our sphere of influence. Michael King, writing for *The Global Citizen*, points out that the acceleration of globalization is tying people and nations together in an interdependent web.¹ You may be familiar with Stanley Milgram’s stunning research revealing just this phenomenon of interconnection. The project discovered that human societies are networked through an incredible “small world” effect characterized by surprisingly short paths of connection between people. Just as the “six degrees of separation” concept sees each person as no more than six “steps” away from any other person on Earth, likewise we should extend the idea that the actions of any given person are no more than six steps away from affecting any other person on this small world.

¹ Michael King, “Fostering Global Citizenship” *The Global Citizen*. Sp 2005, pp. 81.

We can no longer believe that the consequences of our lives are confined to the local. Martin Luther King Jr. recognized it already decades ago: “No individual or nation can stand out boasting of being independent. We are interdependent.” Interconnection is undeniable—just read Thomas Friedman’s *The World is Flat*. The question for us is “How does this interconnection relate to contemporary peace concerns?” This is what I wish to tap tonight.

A short while ago some students in one of my classes were discussing Christian responsibilities to love, especially as they related to non-violence. Somewhere along the way, I chimed in with some concerns about “green” lifestyles and was thunderstruck by the confusion that followed: “I thought we were talking about non-violence. Are you talking about environmentalism or are you talking about pacifism?”

“Uh...both,” I responded. “They’re related.” At this point, it really struck home for me that we may be far behind the times. Globalizing factors are spinning the world in on itself so fast, that the average human is not keeping up with the dizzying connections forming. Consequently, commonly held visions of non-violence and of peacebuilding are not keeping up.

Don’t get me wrong, there are certainly some in the academic and “professional peace” world that are keeping pace. Lisa Schirch’s *The Little Book of Strategic Peacebuilding* has addressed these expansive connections as they relate to various disciplinary fields. Peacebuilding *is* more complex than most people think, it *is* much wider and interconnected than most realize, involving just about any discipline you can think of. Dr. Dan Wessner’s IC³ educational program does not include a specific topic on peace because it is understood that peace is an underlying connection between the ten core topics.

As illustrated in their work, many who've committed their lives to the work of peace are seeing the realities of interconnectivity surging ahead and are running to catch up.

Unfortunately, my experience from class, from church, from my family and from numerous other conversations reveals that most people are not grasping the interrelationship of seemingly disparate disciplinary fields to peace and more distressingly, they are not even grasping the interconnection that their personal actions have to peace around the world. It is this latter deficiency that I really want to address.

Why does it matter that we trace the connections that our actions have? As I have mentioned already, we can no longer pretend to be isolated individuals. The nature of our communication technology, our economies and our shared ecosystems don't allow us the privilege of ignoring our relationship to other people. Every action has global consequences and we need to understand them in order to be sure we're acting in a kingdom of peace manner. If we learn to make the connections, which are undeniable in our increasingly globalized world, we'll be more proficient at spotting practical peace concerns. Being in the habit of drawing lines of connection will help us choose the most just options for action. This is the first reason for tracing our lines of influence.

Secondly, having the ability to connect the dots will link our actions undeniably to the fate of our neighbors, both local and global. Drawing the lines of connection will help foster a sense of global citizenship. If we follow the connections far enough, we'll see human faces at the other end and realize that our actions affect other individuals. Speaking from my own experience, when I see another person facing the consequences of my actions, it is much easier to cease engagement in so many of my selfish and detrimental habits and to continue the actions with life giving consequences. When we see that we are not autonomous entities and are in fact part of an interconnected humanity in an

interconnected world, we are more ready to live for peace. This is a stepping stone for peace.

Michael King, of Suas Educational Development in Ireland, says that many of the world's greatest, most intractable problems are crafts of human hands, enabled because people's perceptions of personal responsibility are restrained by their limited awareness of the global communities with whom they share interdependence. King insists that a mindset of global interconnectedness "shapes our actions such that we refrain from pursuing personal, ethnic or national demands without taking into consideration their effects on others." King believes that if we teach future leaders to spot the connections together, it will provide common ground to work together across numerous disciplines to address our global challenges and conflicts.² This is also a stepping stone for peace.

[On a flip chart, draw out lines of connection for a light bulb and for biking]

Maybe this takes too much dreaming. Maybe my lines are too imaginative. They certainly aren't verifiable as much as they are hypothetical, but I *strongly* believe that even if you examine the actions and objects in your life and the systems surrounding you, even with a less permissive imagination, you will *still* uncover a dense web of connecting and interconnecting lines. Some connections may appear to be inconsequential dead ends. They certainly won't all lead to new actions, but—here is the critical point—it is the ability and the habit of drawing out our connections that will lead us to see the ones that do matter. If nothing else, it will draw us away from isolated, apathetic individualism into active compassion for the other who tastes the sour grapes or sweet wine that we tread.

I conclude, first with a disclaimer. I started working on this address with a long list of ideas that addressed contemporary peace concerns to speak on, but some of my first

² King, *The Global Citizen*. pp. 80-81.

proposals met with questioning looks, “How is that related to peace? Hospitality? Campus and community gardening? Yes, I can see that Non-violent direct action training has a fairly obvious connection to contemporary peace concerns, but biking and taking shorter showers?” With the blank looks, it occurred to me that perhaps the prerequisite step to addressing concerns for peace in our rapidly globalizing world involves learning to habitually connect the dots between our actions and those around the world. The large majority of people are not grasping the connections our actions or our disciplinary fields have to peace.

To make a strong case for peace through any of the seemingly discombobulated proposals, we must first lay the groundwork, empowering people to connect the dots. Once this is done, then we can start explaining how economic justice, sexual health education, and environmentalism are joined to the gospel of peace. Seemingly unrelated proposals for peace will fall on more receptive, open ears once the eyes see the connecting lines.

So let’s get started. Why not have classes where the professor and students spend their semester intentionally connecting seemingly dissimilar actions, ideas and disciplines to peace concerns? Why not emphasize the environmental connections to security and peace at the 2008 *Be Faithful, Be Green Conference*, or get out the white board and draw connections in a Sunday school or sermon series. How about doing the same in the *Daily News Record*, at peace conferences, for our senators, at the coffee shop, as a spiritual discipline or at the dinner table with our kids? Seeing the consequences of our choices in the faces of global neighbors will incite us to more just action, leading us to live and work for connections to peace. Practicing the habit of drawing the connections, of connecting the dots, is our first step.

Go. Connect your dots.