Week 1: The Bond: The Pull of Wholeness

Reading preparation: (Prologue, Introduction and Chapters 1-4 of The Bond)

This weekly topic introduces the basic principles of The Bond: Nature’s most basic drive is for global cooperation and unity, not competition.

For centuries, Western culture has taught us to think of ourselves as individuals. Competition, assumed to be the most fundamental of human urges, is the basis of the societies of most modern developed countries. It is the engine of our economy, and it is assumed to be the basis of most of our relationships — in business, in our neighborhoods, even with our closest friends.

An entirely new scientific story is emerging that challenges these assumptions. Frontier scientists have found evidence that things in the universe are not “individual” in any sense of the term. In every area of our lives, from the smallest particles of our being to our relationships and communities, there is a Bond — a connection so integral and profound that there is no longer a clear demarcation between the end of one thing and the beginning of another.

And rather than a will to dominate, the essential impulse of all of life is a will to connect. Nature has not only designed a vast interconnected superorganism but also hardwired us to share, care and be fair.

These discoveries hold not only vast implications about how we choose to define ourselves, but also vast implications about how we ought to live our lives. All of our societal creations, invested as they are in competition and individuality, run counter to our most fundamental being. A drive for cooperation and partnership, not dominance, is fundamental to us and all other living things. In fact the crises we face today have occurred precisely because most of us in the developed world are not living in harmony with our true nature.

The point of this sermon is to both to recognize the new story — and the discovery that life has been designed for connection, not competition — and to suggest the enormity of the implications this new story has on our relationships, communities and societal structures.

Possible points to cover:

• Subatomically, there is no such thing as an individual thing. Even a subatomic particle is not a thing, but a relationship.
• Our bodies are created ‘outside in’ - through so many complex interactions with their environment that they cannot be considered to exist independently.

• Human beings, like all living things, are part of a vast, intergalactic superorganism. Our health, our mental stability, and possibly even much of what we consider our uniquely individual motivation are partly at the whim of solar activity.

• We understand the actions of others by simulating the entire experience in our brains via mirror neurons from a personal vantage point — as though it were happening to us.

Week 2: Born to Belong

Reading preparation: Chapters 5, 6 and 7 of The Bond.

German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche proposed that the driving force of all human motivation is a ‘will to power.’ Yet, as the latest science demonstrates, rather than a will to dominate, the essential impulse of all life is a will to connect.

Deep connection, rather than competition, is the quality most essential to human nature: the latest science shows that we were never meant to live a life of isolation and self-serving survival. We experience the greatest stress and the most serious illnesses when we are isolated from others and from a sense of connection.

The most fundamental of our needs is a sense of belonging. Humanity is profoundly tribal; we feel most at home in small clusters in which we are a part of the whole. Indeed, so primal is the need to belong that ostracism is one of the most unbearable situations human beings endure.

Belonging may be so necessary to our existence that not satisfying it can be a matter of life or death.

The every-man-for-himself attitude fostered in the West, particularly in American society, can prove deadly to us, particularly to our hearts. Numerous studies show that people who are self-absorbed, cynical, and hostile to the world are more likely to die from a heart attack.

Connection protects us against stroke, depression – even the common cold. One study concluded that relationships of any sort — good or bad — improve your odds of survival by 50 percent.

This social Bond protects us, even in hard times. A sampling of Americans in the lowest income bracket suffered from virtually no stress about their financial circumstances, so long as they had two means of support: a strong spiritual connection and, even more important, a strong spiritual community.

Possible talking points (from Chapters 5, 6 and 7):

• Connecting with others is a matter of life and death; the lone-wolf, Gary Cooper-style all-American hero is a perfect candidate for a heart attack.

• Community is the best medicine we have and even protects us in hard times.
We were born to give, not to be selfish. A desire to help others, even at personal cost, is so necessary to us that we experience it as one of our chief pleasurable activities, as essential and pleasurable as eating and having sex.

One of our deepest needs is to agree with each other. Positive emotions – like happiness – and negative emotions – like loneliness – are both socially contagious.

**Week 3: The Unifying Effect of Fairness**

**Reading Preparation:** Chapter 8 of *The Bond*, plus *The Fairness Campaign* and *The 10 Fairness Principles* from www.thebond.net)

Fairness burns deep within the hearts of each and every one of us. A sense of fairness in any society appears to evolve automatically as an inherent part of working together outside our immediate families. Even in primitive hunter-gatherer societies, human beings have an enormous distaste for hierarchical extremes due to a deeply and finely honed sense of fairness.

*Fairness is hardwired within us,* neuroscientists have discovered an “it’s not fair” spot in the human brain. Studies have demonstrated that people are less interested in receiving rewards for themselves than in rectifying financial inequality.

*Ideas about fairness appear to be universal.* People in most societies have similar sense of what constitutes fairness. Study after study of native indigenous populations and people of all variety of political persuasions reveal that when asked to design ideal societies they produce models of wealth and income distribution roughly like that of Denmark or Sweden, two countries widely considered among the fairest in modern western society.

*Although we may be polarized in many areas, in our hearts all of us — rich, poor, Democrat, Republican — broadly agree on what is fair.*

*Fairness is about fair opportunity* and about operating with integrity and with regard for the whole. ‘Fairness’ is not sameness, but an equal chance, an equal say in areas that affect our society, *a reward commensurate with contribution,* and a reward that does not come at someone else’s expense. It’s about honoring the connection between us all.

Our strongly honed sense of fair play includes a strong sense of the importance of *reciprocity.* Turn-taking entirely rests on the assumption that each of us will have our turn, and that if we do something for someone else, that they will return the favor.

The extent to which any society begins to fray relates to a deterioration of a sense of fairness and basic reciprocity. Epidemiological studies show that in countries with giant income disparity between the very rich and the very poor, *both the most affluent and the very poorest* suffer from higher rates of ill health, crime, mental illness, environmental problems, and violence.

With all of our current crises, re-establishing fairness is crucial to the survival of our American society – and indeed to the survival of us all. The good news is that it doesn’t take much to re-establish fairness. Scientific studies shows that in any society, if a culture of turn-
taking falls apart with too many taking too much, all it requires is a *small group of individuals committed to strong reciprocity* to “invade” a population of self-interested individuals and re-establish fairness and generosity. When you become a spiritual activist for fairness, you set off a contagion of good will.

**Week 4: From ‘Me’ to ‘We’: A Simple Change of Perspective Unites People of All Beliefs**

**Reading Preparation:** chapter 10 of *The Bond*

This sermon centers on how we can connect with people of all religions, beliefs and ethnic backgrounds through a simple change of perspective – from ‘me’ to ‘we’.

Our individual relationships have a lot to do with how we see ourselves in relation to rest of the world. Typically, we like people who are just like we are—who share our own values, our attitudes, our personalities and even our emotional dispositions — and we tend to conflict most with people who are not like us.

But this mindset runs counter to our deeper biological experience of relationships. We are affected by the feelings, actions and thoughts of all others, and they in turn are affected by us, even if we have nothing in common. *As The Bond* demonstrates, we are constantly attuned to all other human beings, and can connect with them once we move beyond a simple clustering of like with like to find the deeper connection that is always present in any relationship.

Once we view ourselves as a part of a bigger whole, we begin to act differently toward each other. When we can learn to change our perspective, and offer ourselves as a vehicle of service to the connection, we can easily find the deeper Bond always present and embrace difference within that larger definition of connection. The key to a successful relationship with *anyone* is to conceive of the relationship as a ‘thing in itself’ and to focus on the ‘space in between’ — the glue that holds it together.

This sermon may be centered around the work of Orland Bishop, who is teaching members of rival gangs in Los Angeles to work together by changing their perspective on what a relationship is for and finding their common humanity by learning to share deeply and from the heart (Study Guide: chapter 10 of *The Bond*).

Bishop teaches the African concept of *ubuntu* — which, from its literal meaning “I am because you are,” suggests that, as co-creators of each other — both observer and observed — we have a commitment to provide to the other what is needed at that moment – whether food, water, or the deepest level of support.

Bishop invites the young men to engage in *indaba*, which is loosely translated as “deep talk,” moving past superficiality to the deepest truth of who you are and what you dream for. When you share this deeply, as he suggests, you surrender to your natural impulse to merge together and you find the common ground of the space between you – the place of your common humanity.

The story of the pro-life and pro-choice activists in Cambridge, Massachusetts in chapter 10 offers a powerful illustration of how this new way of speaking and listening can overcome polarization, helping the staunchest of enemies to become close friends.
Furthermore, the story of the former member of the Hitler youth movement and the daughter of a Holocaust survivor in the same chapter illustrates how sharing deeply also helps with forgiveness and re-establishes connection.

**Week 5: The lessons of Robber’s Cave: How ‘We’re-all-in-this-together’ Builds Community**

**Reading preparation:** Chapter 11 of The Bond

This sermon emphasizes the power of ‘we’re all in this together’ – how common and larger purpose creates instant closeness and cooperation in any social situation. It may also touch upon the power of the larger goal to revitalize any social situation – in your office or neighborhood – to create a close-knit and cooperative community.

The sermon may center on one of the most beloved psychological studies of group behavior, which involved a group of 12-year-old, highly antagonistic boys at summer camp, who were placed into two groups.

For the first several days, the camp counselors (a team of psychologists) encouraged each group to engage in activities to solidify their bond with members of their own group, then engineered situations designed to be highly competitive and frustrating in order to deliberately bring the two groups in conflict. After a while, the experimenters didn’t have to stoke the prejudice between groups. The growing animosity ended in a fierce fistfight that the counselors had to break up.

The psychologists then created a series of crises that were only resolved with the resources and participation of all of the boys. When the Robbers Cave children were given a common goal and purpose – larger than themselves and their group – they readily put aside their differences to work together cooperatively as a superorganism. Ultimately, they befriended each other and unanimously voted to travel home together on the same bus.

Psychologists call this a superordinate goal – a goal only achieved by large cooperative teamwork of two or more people. This study demonstrates that schoolboys indeed are fully capable of turning cruel and bullying toward each other if they are placed in opposing groups and forced to compete over scarce resources. Engaging in sharing and teamwork tends to transcend differences, because it emphasizes the very heart of humanity — *we are all in this together*.

**Possible topics of focus:**

- People who fire together wire together; whenever a group works together for a common goal, the brains of all parties begin to get on the same wavelength — strengthening the bond within the group.

- When we work with others for a common purpose, the science shows that we very quickly and literally get on their wavelengths. Working together in this fashion create collective brain-wave resonance – at the office, at home and in your neighborhood – to create greater cooperation
• Shared activity also creates a ramped-up endorphin release in us, raising pain thresholds, improving individual efforts and ultimately raising our game.

**Week 6: Generosity, the Global Game-changer**

**Reading preparation:** Chapter 12 of *The Bond*

This week focuses on the lessons of Nipun Mehta, who transformed from a classic Silicon Valley ‘turk’ on a six-figure salary to a global ‘game changer’ running international CharityFocus.

Mehta was a high-strung, high-octane prodigy who had begun computer programming at the age of seven, entered Berkeley at sixteen, and by his junior year, had already been snatched up part-time by Sun Microsystems, which picked up the tab for his college tuition. In the middle of 1999, on a six-figure salary Mehta began to have an uneasy sense about the get-rich-quick culture around him – particularly its effect upon himself. At times he felt as though he were drowning in a sea of greed.

One evening Mehta invited twenty of an assortment of his young professional friends to a gathering at his home and invited them to shift the current American culture of greed and materialism, by changing that culture within themselves and carrying out an experiment in the joy of giving and generosity in Silicon Valley – a place with the highest per capita ownership of Ferraris and the lowest percentage of charitable donations in the country.

His story illustrates the power within each of us as global game changers. Tiny acts of generosity can set off a contagion of giving and cooperative behavior in our communities. This sermon may emphasize ways that members of your congregation and community can become a ‘spiritual citizens’ and transform their own life’s purpose from ‘me and mine alone’ to ‘we.’ Simple everyday acts enable each of us to become a powerhouse of change, permanently shifting the culture of greed and materialism around us, through tiny acts of generosity.

**Focus points:**

• The extraordinary and infectious power of generosity or giving to completely transform a business or neighborhood culture. A single act of kindness — change left in a Coke machine for the next person, in one instance — can set off an enormous wave of generosity throughout an entire community — up to three degrees of separation along the social network.

• How acts of generosity change the game in our wider community. Possible stories for inclusion: Karma Kitchen and Mehta’s Wednesdays program.

**Week 7: Change ‘I Win-You Lose’ and Change the World**

**Reading preparation:** Chapter 8 of *The Bond*
This final sermon sums up the new paradigm shift from life as a zero-sum game (‘I win-you lose’, ‘What’s in it for me?’) to the new paradigm (‘I Win AND WHEN the Rest of Our Community Wins’). This can be illustrated by describing the iconic scene in the movie A Beautiful Mind, when the mathematician John Nash realizes that the Adam Smith model of ‘Every Man for Himself’ is wrong.

In the movie, Nash, played by Russell Crowe, is sitting with some fellow graduate students in a bar in Princeton, circa 1948, when a striking blonde walks in with her brunette friends. All five of the boys are attracted to her, but immediately thrown into a quandary. Which of the six of them is going to get lucky and end up with her? One of Nash’s friends quotes Adam Smith: “In competition, individual ambition serves the common good.” From that perspective, one of the men notes, the best strategy is essentially every man for himself.

“Adam Smith needs revision,” Nash suddenly exclaims. “If we all go for the blonde and block each other, not a single one of us is going to get her. So then we go for her friends, but they will all give us the cold shoulder because no one likes to be second choice. But what if none of us goes for the blonde? We won't get in each other's way and we won't insult the other girls. It's the only way to win.

“Adam Smith said, the best result comes from everyone in the group doing what’s best for himself. Incomplete. Incomplete!” Nash declares. “The best result is for everyone in the group doing what’s best for himself . . . and the group.”

The scene is meant to describe one of the most important moments in 20th-century economics. Although given a good deal of poetic license, the point of ‘the Nash Equilibrium’ however, is that the choices that you make should depend on what everyone else does. You choose the best possible position for yourself based on what everyone else is doing, and by choosing what is best for yourself – and best for the group you reach an ‘equilibrium’ where no one can improve his position, given the choices everyone else has made.

The Nash model is the perfect illustration of the new ‘Bond Paradigm’: We do best for society by looking out for ourselves AND the rest of our community. This sermon may encourage congregations and communities to use these principles when overcoming an ‘us vs. them’ mindset and connecting for community and even trans-country goals.

**THE OLD PARADIGM**
- Life is a zero-sum game (I win-you lose)
- What’s in it for me
- I must win, dominate or be first
- I look after my own, period
- Us vs. Them
- We do best for society by looking out for Number 1

**THE 6 PRINC iples of the Bond**
- I win and we all win
- How can I serve?
- I choose to connect, whatever it takes
- I look after my own and the group
- Us + them
- We do best for society by looking out for ourselves AND the rest of our community