

Experiencing God - Wooed To Relationship

Deuteronomy 6: 10-15

Romans 8: 31-39

Matthew 22: 37-38

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Do you ever wonder if we're in a day and age when relationships are at risk?
They tell us that the ozone layer and polar ice caps are at risk. What about relationships?
I wondered - till I came across the following web site. Now I'm sure!

Have you heard of *Cuddling*?

Not sure - check out www.CuddleParty.com.

Yes, you heard me right. And you thought you'd heard it all, eh?

Reid Mihalko's intention in creating Cuddle Party, along with his workshops, lectures, films and books, is to create a safe environment for men and women where they can touch, receive touch, love and communicate with one another in healthy and nutritious ways.

No joke - that's really how they put it.

The idea is to try and recreate a pyjama party environment where people can crowd together, be close, snuggle, touch and be touched in a non-sex environment.

Now, don't shoot the messenger - I'm just telling you what he says!

There are Cuddling Party rules complete with lifeguards to make sure they're enforced. You can even become certified as a Cuddle Party trainer and facilitator. In our impersonal world, here's a way you can get up close and non-sexually personal with other people....

.....so they say.

Like I said -

Do you ever wonder if we're in a day and age when relationships are at risk?

I was chatting with someone recently who said to me:

I believe all people are made to be in relationship. We're not made to go through life all alone. If we do, we get restless.

I believe that, too.

Further - I believe this is true not only of relationships between people, but I believe that all people are also made to be in relationship with God.

And until we enter that relationship our lives will be less than complete.

For many it will result in a feeling of inner emptiness, or dryness or restlessness. Some will live with that gnawing inside. Others will try to compensate in one way or another.

But deep down the need is there for everyone.

Now before you applaud me for that genius statement, best recognize that it doesn't originate with me. People have attributed it all the way back to St. Augustine in the 5th century A.D.

Augustine prayed a famous prayer that went something like, "*Lord, I will remain restless, until I find my rest in Thee.*"

That comes from the idea that there is a created, natural space in every human being's heart that is "God shaped." And unless the One designed for that space fills the space, we will remain restless.

Hence the prayer:

Lord, grant that I find no rest, until I find my rest in Thee.

Last week we began a seven part series based on Henry Blackaby's teaching series called *Experiencing God*. Blackaby suggests that there are seven statements which can be applied as basic truths of Christian living. Last week we looked at the first one, which says that:

God is always at work around you.

We looked together at an account from the life of Jesus as described in John 5. In that passage Jesus says to his listeners:

John 5:17 *My Father is still working, and I also am working.*

God is always at work around you.
He is at work through His Son Jesus Christ.
A work that is bringing
 life where there is death,
 hope where there is despair,
 healing where there is brokenness.

It is the Church season of Epiphany, a season where we consider the Presence of Jesus as it is revealed in this world. And so we remember that -
 God, in Jesus Christ, is always at work around you.

Do we know that?
Do we see it?
Are we looking for it?

That becomes the question St. Paul asks of his friends in the city of Ephesus - a question that formed the basis for his prayer:

May God grant you a Spirit of wisdom and revelation so that you can be tuned in to this power.

That's Paul's prayer.

It's my prayer, too - for myself personally, and for each of you worshipping here as part of the faith family called Calvin Christian Reformed Church

 May the Holy Spirit grant us the ability to see and understand how He is always at work around and within us.

Now, here's where we move the yard sticks a bit further down the field.

The progression for this week.

 When Christ's power moves around us and within us

 When God in Jesus Christ works,

 It is **NOT** like someone on contract - here for a limited period of time and with limited scope, here for hire, here out of obligation, here without a personal interest.

 When God works

 it is not **contract**,

 but

covenant

 that drives the work.

God is at work in a setting of covenant - of deep, lasting, from the heart **relationship** with His people and with the world that He created.

That's Henry Blackaby's second point:

God pursues a continuing love relationship with you that is real and personal.

In a culture that is relationship-challenged, hear the message from God -

 I am here for a relationship with you.

 A safe relationship.

 A forever relationship.

 A relationship that I have made possible,
 and paid the price for.

God is pursuing a continuing love relationship with you
that is real
and that is personal.
Don't ever forget that friends.

We live in a land of great riches and opportunity.
Among the best places in the world to live.
There is so much we can be busy with.
There are so many exciting career and entertainment and recreational possibilities we could explore
- endless!

But we also live in a culture that is deadly to relationships.
Including our relationship with God.
It's one of the hazards of moving up the ladder of life -
- we can easily become silly and arrogant, figuring we can get by without significant
relationships with other people or God. Maybe not as silly looking as Donald Trump.... but he
certainly is a poster child for what the ultimate end could look like.

That's always how it is with human beings.
Which is why the Lord spoke through Moses to the people of Israel, shortly after giving them the 10
Commandments.

Those 10 commandments were the fence posts, the behaviour markers for the relationship
between the Lord and His people. They marked the boundaries of what was good, and what was
destructive to that relationship.

And then the words we read together from Deuteronomy 6:

Israel, when you get settled and life begins to go well. when your bank account fills up,
and your pantry has lots of food, and your house is built and your bed is warm.....

.... **don't** forget about your relationship with me.

God wouldn't have said that if it wouldn't have been a potential problem.
But it **WAS** a real problem.
One that had to be named, faced and conquered.

For us too.
For the Lord is pursuing a love relationship with us, too friends.
One that is real.
One that is personal.

More than anything else - **that** is God's goal for our lives.
To have us live in personal covenant relationship with Him.
Sharing.
Honest.
Open.
Intimate.

Matthew 22: leading religious experts corner Jesus and ask him the big question -
Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?

And Jesus said to them -

- please join me in repeating His answer -

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and first commandment.

God wants you to give yourself **totally** to Him.

Just like a bride gives herself totally to her beloved - heart, soul, mind, body...

... everything!

That is the absolutely **greatest** part of the Christian life.

NO Christian goes through their life on earth devoid of relationship.

EVERY believer in Jesus Christ is presented with the privilege of living
each second,
each minute,
each hour,
each day,
each week,
each year

in a personal relationship of love and trust with God.
with God, their heavenly **FATHER**.

You get that privilege through Jesus.

The privilege of knowing that someone cares for you.

The privilege of knowing that when you speak, that someone is listening.

The privilege of knowing that wherever you go, that someone is with you.

The privilege of knowing that whenever you fall, that someone will pick you up.

That someone,

Your Father in Heaven.

Do you understand that?

The Christian life is not first of all about how you behave.

The Christian life is not first of all about having an impressive list of accomplishments.

The Christian life is not first of all about living obediently by some code of ethics.

The Christian life is not first of all about getting up and going to church.

The Christian life is not first of all about **doing** anything.

It is about **being**.

BEING -

- in case you didn't notice, that's a relationship word.

Oh, and by the way, that's not just true in our relationship with God, either.

Doing

can never take the place of

being.

Actions can never replace relationship.

Rob Smitty found that out the hard way.

Rob donated one of his kidneys to a stranger. He thought it was a noble and generous sacrifice. While browsing the Internet, this divorced father developed an interest in people needing organs. He said his motivation involved **doing** something that would make his children proud.

But his 10-year-old daughter wasn't impressed by his sacrifice. Amber said her father never comes to see her and never calls, not even on her birthday. "I don't think he's much of a hero," she said.

["Child-Support Issue Clouds Man's Organ Donation," The Courier Journal (11-15-04)]

God isn't sitting in heaven, arms folded, waiting for us to **do** something that will impress Him.

All that needs doing, he's already done.

What He wants is for us to be open to Him, receptive to Him, to love Him.

He's done all the doing.

Just look here at the table.

This is, friends, one of the highlights of the Christian experience.

Through the centuries this action has always been recognized as one of the most significant moments for a believer.

For here we are confronted with how far God was willing to go in order to get that relationship with us.

Here we see the cost.

the life of His Son.

A cost willingly and lovingly paid.

For those who don't believe, this ritual makes little sense.

It is merely a sliver of bread, and quick gulp from a cup.

But when you open your inner life -

your thought life

your emotional life

the deepest part of your being - your soul -

when you open that up and welcome Jesus in

suddenly this meal becomes incredibly important.

We call this ritual *Holy Communion* -

Holy for Christ is the host of this mealtime occasion

Communion because in a very real way we enter a zone of special togetherness, of **being with** the Son of God. In some mysterious way the Holy Spirit brings the real presence of Christ right into us. He enters us even as we take in this ordinary little piece of bread and lift this tiny little cup.

This action is all about **relationship**, a holy-human relationship that we are privileged to share in;

a relationship that God establishes

that He invites us to

that He protects and values

very,

very

deeply.

And until this relationship is in place, nothing else in the whole spectrum of Christian activity and living matters.

Nothing.

Jesus Christ came to this earth to establish a personal, lasting love relationship between God and us.

He gave His life on the cross to make it possible.

He stands today inviting us to it.

If you have never made a definite step of committing to such a relationship, I ask you, *Why not? What's holding you back?*

What on earth is worth turning your back, or holding out, on a free, living, daily, love relationship with your Creator and God?

If you're here today and you consider yourself a Christian because you have tried your best to live right, because you have kept the golden rule - I challenge you to leave the list of what you've **done** behind.

Drop it here today.

And instead, quietly breathe a prayer of welcome to Jesus.

Invite Him to - in whatever mysterious way He chooses - enter your life:

to enter the world of your personal thoughts and hopes and dreams

to enter right into your body

to be the sacred, permanent guest and friend in your life.

Hear the good news of the Bible, friends.

In our hi tech, low touch society which is **so** relationship challenged, there is a very precious, very strong, totally eternal relationship

- a truly DIVINE relationship

waiting for you.

And what will it bring?

Let me close with these words:

ROMANS 8: 31-39