

## **LOVING THE GOD WHO LOVES YOU**

Value depends on connection.

How much is a Pen worth? (It all depends. In the hands of the 52 men who signed the Declaration of Independence and started a new nation, it is priceless. In the hand of William Shakespeare, the pen writes timeless plays and sonnets. But a pen that fell down the couch with lost change and stale popcorn kernels, is just worthless junk).

How much is a key worth? (It all depends. What door does it open? We have some keys in the bottom of our junk drawer, that we have no memory what they are for. The key to our car, however, is incredibly valuable when we need to go somewhere.)

How much is a human life really worth? -- all depends! Just like a pen, or a key, a life disconnected -- disconnected from God -- is a waste. But when a human life is connected to God, that life begins to have the fullness God intended, potential, the purpose and direction God intends.

ALL life has worth & value, but a life connected with God has FULL value.

### **What does it mean to be CONNECTED TO GOD?**

Jesus describes a life connected w/ God is like.

*An expert in the Bible said to [Jesus], "You are right, Teacher. You have truly said that [The Lord] is one, and there is no other besides him."<sup>33</sup> And to love him with all the heart and with all the understanding and with all the strength, and to love one's neighbor as oneself, is much more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices."<sup>34</sup> And when Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God."*

To be connected to God is to have a relationship with Him of love and trust.

**There are 2 reasons why you should love and trust God above everything and everyone.** #1 because we WANT to, & #2 because we NEED to.

Why do we WANT to love God first, best, and only? Psalm 147 in the Bible tells us that we love God because He is good to all people, the righteous and the unrighteous, the godly and the ungodly.

***“Celebrate and sing!***

***Play your harps for the Lord our God.***

***He fills the sky with clouds and send rain to the earth,***

***So that the hills will be green with grass.***

***He provides food for cattle and for the young ravens, when they cry out.***

***He makes your city gates strong and blesses your people by giving them children.***

***God lets you live in peace, and He gives you the very best wheat. As soon as God speaks, the earth obeys.***

***He covers the ground with snow like a blanket of wool,***

***And He scatters frost like ashes on the ground.***

***At His command the ice melts, and the wind blows, and streams begin to flow”*** Psalm 147:7-9, 13-16,18

Why do we WANT to love God first, best, and only? Because He's given house, home, food, clothes, family, friends, TV's, cars. He's given the beauty of the fall leaves changing color, and the sparkle of dew on the grass in the morning. The laughter of children, and most importantly, most graciously, God the Father has given His Son, Jesus! Martin Luther's Catechism reminds us, ***“All this He does only out of fatherly, divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness in me.”*** How can I HELP but love a God like that? How can I HELP but want Him in 1<sup>st</sup>, best & only spot in my life?? In the Bible, John said it this way: ***“We love because He first loved us.”*** <sup>1</sup> *John 4:19* The first reason is we WANT to love God first and best.

The second reason you should love and trust God above everything and everyone is we NEED to. *God knows that whatever else you give your ultimate allegiance and affection to will only lead to terrible destruction and disappointment – now and in eternity!* In other words, whatever you put in 1<sup>st</sup> place in your life that isn't the true God, will actually destroy you!

Every one of us is CONNECTED to someone or something. Every one of us learns to love someone or something the most in our lives.

If you wonder why people these days have such a short fuse, they blow up at each other in fits of rage, they talk behind each other's back, they are envious, and jealous, and there is just so much emotional drama. The reason is that we in America, are connected to someone or something that makes us this way.

Jesus is the only one deserving of your love, but Jesus isn't the only One who wants to win your love. The Evil One, the devil, will use anyone and anything to get you and anyone else to follow him – follow him right to an eternity in hell! The devil will try to get you connected to Him so that you act and think like him. In the Bible, we are told what the effects of being connected to the devil are in a human life:

***“sexual immorality, impurity, lustful pleasures,<sup>20</sup> idolatry, sorcery, hostility, quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, dissension, division,<sup>21</sup> envy, drunkenness, wild parties, and other sins like these.”***

Galatians 5:19b-20

Its sad, but too often that sounds like what we hear from politicians and news commentators these days. We wonder why the character of America has changed, why there is so much senseless violence and murder, its' because we have turned away from God, and as a nation we have followed anyone but God. It doesn't matter whether you vote red or blue. In every walk of life, every income, every color of skin, in every community there are people whose hearts are not connected in love to Jesus.

Some may sit in church on a Sunday morning, but their real cathedrals of worship are banks, sports stadiums, internet, cabin/vacation/retirement home, and many other places where give their ultimate affection.

A man may go to a stadium, sit in blizzard, put \$200 down, shout & cheer, if team loses upset (shed a tear), but the same man goes to church sits arms folded, doesn't sing or speak, not moved emotionally, & complains about the few dollars put into offering plate. What or who does he love? What holds his heart?

We WANT to love God first & best, because of His love to each of us! We NEED to love God first & best because anything else we put in 1<sup>st</sup> place in our lives will not come thru for you, and in the end will destroy you.

Paul wrote, ***“I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain the resurrection from the dead.”***

I want to know Christ personally.

This last week I learned something new. I learned that Buddhist do not have a personal god. They only have illuminated teachers. What a difference we Christians have. We can have a personal, intimate relationship with a crucified, but risen, Lord. We can, in fact, know him like we know family members and friends who are the closest to us. This is why the Bible speaks of God as our Father, Jesus as our Brother, and the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of the Risen Christ. God is our friend; He is our shepherd. He is a person with whom we can relate. We can know Him, even as husbands and wives know each other; as friends relate to one another. This is what our faith is all about.

I love the way Mike Yaconelli writes of this in his book, *Messy Spirituality*

“Spirituality is not a formula; it is not a test. It is a relationship. Spirituality is not about competency; it is about intimacy. Spirituality is not about perfection; it is about connection. The way of the spiritual life begins where we are *now* in the mess of our lives. Accepting the reality of our broken, flawed lives is the beginning of spirituality, not because the spiritual life will remove our flaws, but because we *let go* of seeking perfection and instead seek God, the one who is present in the tangledness of our lives. Spirituality is not about being fixed; it is about God’s being present in the mess of our unfixedness.”

Mike Yaconelli. *Messy Spirituality*. Zondervan, 2002, page 13.

And I would add that is never clearer than in the death of His Son, Jesus Christ, despised and rejected for our sakes! He's the One I want to know personally.

I want to experience (Him and) His power. Paul wrote, ***"I want to know Christ and the power of His resurrection."*** I can't think of a greater power in the world than the power of God which not only created this universe but reversed the power of death by the resurrection of His Son from the dead.

We access that power by knowing Him personally. We trust in Him and He comes to us and wants to unleash His power in and through us. He is the One who has overcome the world. He is the One who will also empower those who trust in Him to be raised from the dead.

In this verse, Paul mentions something else that happens to a person if he or she lives in a close connection of receiving love from Jesus, and in response returning our love to Jesus. Paul wrote, ***"I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, to attain to the resurrection from the dead."***

I know of people who want to share in the power of Christ's resurrection but refuse to share in the fellowship of His sufferings, and in the process, they never become everything God intends for them to become. But when they agree to do so, God transforms their lives.

"Helen Roseveare was a British medical doctor who worked for many years as a missionary in the nation of Congo in Africa. During the revolution of the 1960s, she often faced brutal beatings and other forms of physical torture. On one occasion, when she was about to be executed, she feared God had forsaken her.

"In that moment, she sensed the Holy Spirit saying to her: Twenty years ago you asked me for the privilege of being identified with me. This is it. Don't you want it? This is what it means. These are not your sufferings; they are my sufferings. All I ask of you is the loan of your body.

The privilege of serving Christ through her sufferings overwhelmed Dr. Roseveare. After she was delivered, she wrote about her experience with God: ‘He didn’t stop the sufferings. He didn’t stop the wickedness, the cruelties, the humiliation or anything. It was all there. The pain was just as bad. The fear was just as bad. But it was altogether different. It was Jesus, for him, with him.’”

(Philip Ryken, *The Message of Salvation*, Inter-Varsity Press, 2001)

A life connected to Jesus, is not easy. It is often filled with suffering and pain. A life connected to Jesus is precious in God’s sight. It is a life useful to Him. Your life connected to Jesus is renewed in His forgiveness, given freely, undeservedly, and overflowing. Your life connected to Jesus is filled with quiet joy, unshakable hope, and a certain future in heaven.

I trust you’re asking yourself HOW? HOW is a person connected to Jesus? How can I love and honor the God who loves me first, best and only? HOW does this connection happen?

A couple – a woman and a man – are attracted to each other and want to be together. Why? Partly to ease their loneliness. Partly for the help they give each other – they make a good team. Couples want to be together because we all need encouragement, and a person who is on our side. Of course there’s physical attraction and love. It’s that crazy, unexplainable thing that she is the most beautiful thing he has ever seen, and he makes her heart go “pitter-pat.”

Now, because he wants to be with her and she with him, when they are in their 20’s they may go to Cedar Pointe together, run marathons together, or go white water rafting together. In their 30’s they spend time together getting the kids in and out of the bath tub, into pj’s, in bed, then they have a quiet hour to relax together while the kids sleep. In their 40’s a man and a woman choose to be together by walking the dog as they talk, or go to the kids’ sports games. In their 50’s they go antique shopping together, every Saturday eat breakfast at a local café. In their 60’s together they drive through country. In their 70’s and 80’s the same couple chooses to be together by doing

the crossword together, and going out to supper together at 3 in the afternoon.

The specific activities are not the most important. The activities are vehicles to being together. The activities they do are the vehicles to receiving love and loving back. They don't do those things together because they have to. They do those things together because they love each other. A life together as a couple is not just a long list of things you must do. It's about being together so you can give love and be loved. The activities are the vehicles that allow the love to happen.

Here's my point: Next week we begin a 6-week, 42-day spiritual renewal process called "What On Earth Am I Here For?" For 6 weeks there are activities we encourage all of you to do. We hope these activities become ingrained so that they are long-term habits we all do regularly. There are 4 habits: 1. Worship every week. 2. A daily personal devotional time in God's Word. 3. Gather together with other believers for a Bible study time. 4. Memorize a verse of God's Word so you keep it with you at all times.

We might mistake "What On Earth Am I Here For" as being about doing these 4 habits. And that would be a mistake. Because these are vehicles. They are just activities like couples do together. The important thing is what you receive AS you do them – you receive love and grace. And you return love to God.

As we grow these next 6 weeks, we will discover God's five purposes for your life. And so we are going to learn about, there is going to be a lot of emphasis on:

1. **Worshipping**
2. **Being in Christian Community** – that is, intentionally building relationships with other believers where you encourage and are encouraged, where you love others and are loved, where you know others and are

3. **Care** – helping other people with their practical needs
5. **Giving** – Money. Using your finances for God's work in this world. Setting aside a regular, selfless gift that you give joyfully to God as a response to His giving you Jesus, and everything you have and are.
7. **Witnessing** – building relationships with people in your life, relationships that are strong enough that you can talk about matters of the heart and faith in Jesus, and the difference His grace has made in your life.
- known.
4. **Being into God's Word** – in daily Bible reading and devotions. Having your mind and attitudes and heart-desires shaped by God.
6. **Serving** - discovering your abilities and using a portion of your time for God and to help other people.
8. And **Praying** – taking the time to invite God into your needs, trusting that He can do more in a moment than you can in your entire lifetime.

These are not new things. We've all heard about these before. And these can be viewed by some people as rules. Some people even think that being a Christian is about DOING – doing these things. They believe that these are good works that earn God's favor, His help, forgiveness, and in the end heaven. No! No! Christianity is not about what you DO, because it's all been DONE by Jesus. Forgiveness and heaven have been won by what Jesus has DONE in His living, dying, rising, and coming again.

"What on Earth Am I Here For" will emphasize God's purposes and emphasize all these things to DO. And it is important that we keep



clear that Jesus is behind everyone. It's important that we keep Jesus #1 above anything, or anyone.

These commitments, these activities we do, are like a couple who want to keep growing in their relationship, and so they do things together. It's the relationship that is all important, not the specific activities they do together. And for you and me, it is the relationship with Jesus, our Savior, that is so important. We just do these activities so that we can spend time with Him, so that we learn from Him.

Do we need to grow in doing these 8 things? Yes. Do they take time and effort and energy? Yes. And let's be sure that these are ways to have God #1 in our life. We can't build a church that is a work of God, we can't reach people for God, unless we are PEOPLE of God! Unless Jesus lives in our hearts and minds in His fullness and grace.

Folks – that's not something we HAVE to do. Something we WANT to do, And when we come to know God, His love, His ways, His provision, His forgiveness more & more – then we WANT to live for Him. We need to be people who are CONNECTED to God. Without being CONNECTED to God, we will never realize our full value.

Thomas a Kempis lived in the 1400's. In his book, *The Imitation of Christ*, he wrote this prayer:

O Lord, there can be no goodness in us, if You withdraw  
Yourself.

No wisdom can benefit us, if You cease to guide us.

No strength can preserve us, if You no longer defend.

No purity can be secure, if You do not guard it.

No watchfulness of our own can protect us, if You do not  
keep watch.

If You abandon us, we are soon lost and perish.

But if You come to us with Your grace, we are lifted up to  
live again.

We are weak, but You make us strong.

We are cold and dull, but by You are we set ablaze.

Thomas a Kempis, 1380 – 1471

He's talking about a life connected to God.

Do you want a life of joy, peace, hope, and purpose? That life only comes from one place (one PERSON) – comes from being connected with God.

WHY?

He made you

He saved you

He's fixin' to take you to heaven

LOVE the God who loves You!