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Overview For “Connection” Series. . .

“Intimacy With God”

July 6, 2008

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Scripture: Philippians 3:10

INTRODUCTION

Does anyone recognize this building? [[PPT of Sistine Chapel](#)]

This is the Sistine Chapel, completed in 1481. . .the best-known chapel in Vatican City (which sits inside Rome). When it was built, the ceiling was a blue pincushion sky full of golden stars. But in 1508, Pope Julius II commissioned Michelangelo (a sculptor) to breathe new life high up in this beautiful cathedral.

Michelangelo never really wanted to take on this project. First of all, he was a sculptor—more comfortable working with marble than a paintbrush. Secondly, he resented the Pope, believing his work only served the Pope’s need for grandeur. Little did he know that this would become his crowning achievement!

When you look inside, you are immediately struck that someone could paint such an enormous area while perched on a specially constructed scaffold 60 feet up. The area he painted—at least as big as this sanctuary (probably bigger in square footage)—is mind-boggling. Remember this was the early 1500’s! It took him 4 years to do it; it was completed in 1512.

His frescoes (i.e.: paintings on wet plaster walls) depict scenes from the Book of Genesis—from the days of Creation to the Noah & the Flood. [[PPT of the Ceiling](#)] There are 9 carefully reconstructed stories along with more than 300 Biblical figures, including prophets, ancestors of Jesus, and figures central to ancient Israel.

Here is *God separating the Waters from the Heavens* [[PPT](#)]. I know it looks “busy”, but notice how amazingly correct his figures look on curved surfaces! This is *The Creation of the Sun and Moon and Earth* [[PPT](#)]. Here is the one that made Michelangelo famous: *The Creation of Adam* [[2 PPTs](#)]. I love how he depicts the hand of God giving life to Adam (to man).

We’ve chosen this marvelous image as a symbol for a new series of sermons on drawing closer to God. . .maintaining a strong connection. . .growing even more passionate in your spirituality. We’re calling it simply **“Connection”**.

Take note of a couple things.

- A. This work of art depicts closeness (intimacy). The man is made in the image of God—portrayed visually using physical bodies, but we know the connection runs deeper.

- B. It shows God reaching out...taking the initiative in establishing a connection. God wants a relationship with us more than even we do (even though the desire for a relationship with God is “built in” to each one of us). God has shown that again & again throughout history. He’s come to us thru the Patriarchs / the Prophets / the Kings (like David) / the writings of Holy Scripture / ultimately Jesus (His Son) / and now the Holy Spirit (given to the church and individual believers).
- C. There’s a little gap between the fingers. That is because we are prone to pull away, to drift, to fall away. Nothing stays the same. All relationships involving human beings are always doing one of two things:
- 1) Either pulling away- -slipping backwards- -fading- -weakening;
 - 2) Or moving forward- -strengthening in the bond / trust- -becoming more life-giving.

One thing is certain: Relationships do not stay the same; they are constantly changing.

Take MARRIAGE. . .

- First flush of ecstasy & excitement. The mention of his/her name evokes a burst of zeal & delight.
- Then we get used to one another. . . start to take each other for granted. Before long, the excitement turns to dull routine. If a couple does not work to keep the relationship alive & vital, they will grow further and further apart.

The same is true in our CHRISTIAN WALK + in the CHURCH:

- We start out with “new life in Christ” (e.g.: can’t read enough of the Bible, soaking up its truth. . .prayer is alive and you can’t wait. . .can’t wait to be around other Christians. . . eager to share this new life with friends). OR, you go through a time of intense “revival”.
- [FOOTNOTE] Maybe you grew up in the church. There’s an inherent danger of missing out on this “falling in love” phase.
- Then you go through a desert (a dry & lonely place). Your “faith tank” is on empty. The surface relationship we’ve maintained with God isn’t doing it for us anymore.

OUR GOAL: INTIMACY

What we’re craving, I believe is **intimacy**—intimacy with God. What I mean by *intimacy* is closeness—closing the gap between the fingers (i.e.: touching and being touched by God). It’s depth we’re after, isn’t it, not heights (e.g.: mountain-top highs, feelings of exhilaration). I want substance; not just outward appearance or lip service (cf. II Timothy 3:5)—not something that’s shallow & superficial. I want the close association. . .the friendship. . . the joy of knowing one another on a personal and private level. . .the deep inner assurance that no matter what I go through (or do. . .even if I blow it big time), He’s right there with me. That’s intimacy!

Marcie & I celebrated our 10th anniversary back in May. I know that’s not a long time (compared to some of you), but we’ve been through some things. We’ve spent a lot of time getting to know one another (e.g.: the little habits, gestures, the ways of thinking & reacting). Even though we were fully married on May 30th, 1998, today I can honestly say that we are a whole lot more married than we were back then. The love we enjoy now is deeper. . .there’s a feeling of being safe and comfortable around one another. . .and a profound sense of security that these 10+ years of life shared together have brought us to. That’s what I mean by intimacy.

But we’ve had to work at it! It didn’t just happen! It’s fragile! There are always points along the way when the connection could break down.

It’s that way in our spiritual life. There are a myriad of forces, distractions, temptations, cares, pressures (et.al.) that can pull us apart from God and weaken our connection.

THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER

In **Mark 4**, there is a familiar parable. Jesus tells the parable, then explains it (cf. vv. 14-20). . .

This is not just about evangelism (i.e.: seed being sown in the lives of unbelievers). It's about what goes on in the life of all of us (i.e.: the fight, the struggle that goes on over what God wants to do in the lives of fully committed believers). God is always sowing / planting (i.e.: speaking into our lives):

- 1) Satan takes it away. OR.....
- 2) God speaks- -there's an immediate joyful response- -trouble or something unexpected comes along → it's too much for the tiny sprouts. They're gone. What God was starting to do must not have been real. OR.....
- 3) We go a little deeper- -things of the world & worries of life come in to snuff (crowd) everything out.
- 4) It takes a lot to live as God created us to live, to walk in our calling, to be a person of good & noble heart. It has to be with perseverance that we retain the Word that was planted in us when Christ came and redeemed our life → produce a crop that is 30-60-100 fold beyond what we ever dreamed imaginable. The soil will have to be continuously cultivated if we are going to grow deep, to have rootedness to withstand all that comes against us.

The point of the parable is that you have to go for it / strive for it / fight for it. It won't always be easy. That's what Jesus means when He speaks of "the mystery of the Kingdom of God":

- God sows. He puts a new heart in you.....
- But because of what the world, the flesh, and the devil try to do to you, you have to be diligent and intentional; you have to take an active role in hanging on to the seed that's been planted.

So, in a world that is always distracting us, always working against our growing close to God or maintaining an intimate connection with the One who gave us life to begin with—how do we pull it off?

THE MEANS: DISCIPLINE

That's what this series about. Call it a series on *the disciplines of the Christian life*, but that'll probably turn most of you off. Neither Matt nor I want to leave you with the impression:

- That we are in cahoots with your DENTIST who scolds you for not flossing;
- Or your CARDIOLOGIST who callously pokes your expanding gut;
- It is not our purpose to SHAME you into walking a spiritual treadmill;
- Nor to convey to you that the Christian life is a no-fun list of DO's & DON'T's;
- Or a way to get God to LOVE / ACCEPT you. [Nothing you can do will make you more acceptable to your Heavenly Father than you already are.]

On the other hand, I don't want to suggest that becoming like Christ will be easy. If you want intimacy with God (i.e.: if you want to strengthen the connection. . .deepen the relationship. . . become more like Christ)—that is going to take some hard work, some focused determination.

Intimacy with God requires action; it doesn't just happen. We can sing or pray "*Lord, lift me up to higher ground*", but He isn't going to send down a crane to pick you up and set you on a mountain-top.

Like it or not, Paul does say in **I Timothy 4:7**. . .

- "**Discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness.**" [NASB]
- "**Train yourself for godliness.**" [NET]

- “Spend time and energy in training yourself for spiritual fitness.” [NLT]
- “Take the time and trouble to keep yourself spiritually fit.” [Phillips]

The word “discipline” comes from a Greek word pronounced “*gumnazo*” from which we get our English word *gymnasium*. He’s saying that as good as physical conditioning is, conditioning ourselves toward godliness (i.e.: making God, not self, the center of our lives) is even better.

Our goal is to know Christ! This is our lead verse—read **Philippians 3:10** [NIV & NLT]. . .
“I want to know Christ (intimately) and experience the mighty power that raised Him from the dead. I want to share in the fellowship of His sufferings, and become like Him in His death.”
 So:

- When you pray, don’t do it to fulfill an obligation. Pray so you might know Him.
- When you set about to simplify, do it to make room for Him to speak, to lead, to act.
- When you surrender or behave with humility or sacrifice, do it as a means of identifying with Him, so that you may become more like Him.

I guess “discipline” is not such a bad word for this. The late coach of the Dallas cowboys, Tom Landry, had a winning team for almost 30 years. When he was asked how he did it year after year, he replied: “*My job is to get men to do what they don’t want to do in order to achieve what they’ve always wanted to achieve.*”

Here is the Good News: Discipline, unappealing and unpleasant as it is, always springs from a desire, a “want to” that the Holy Spirit puts on our hearts. **Philippians 2:12f** says: **“Continue to work out your salvation; obey God with deep reverence and fear. For God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to live according to His good purpose.”**

CONCLUSION

GOAL: A deeply intimate relationship with God that is consistent, meaningful, and satisfying.

QUESTION: Is it possible? Yes!

HOW: If we work at it. If we cultivate such “disciplines” as:

- Simplicity (uncluttering our minds)
 - Silence & Solitude (slowing our pace)
 - Surrender (releasing our grip)
 - Prayer (calling out)
 - Humility (bowing low)
 - Self-Control (holding back)
 - Sacrifice (giving over)
- Some of these will get rid of something → create room in your life;
 - Others will add vitality & authenticity to your spiritual life.

Let me ASK you this morning: If you were the “Adam” in Michelangelo’s painting:

- How close would He paint the fingers if it were you in the picture?
- How close would you like Him to paint the fingers?